

CHAPTER FOUR

AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL: ATHA AND THE DAWN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Prince George's County and its government underwent great changes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and today, the commercial centers of the county have spread beyond the county seat of Upper Marlboro, largely following major transportation routes over land, water, and air.

Before the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the local communities in ATHA were primarily rural and sparsely populated. By the opening decades of the twentieth century, a number of significant factors contributed to the area's transition from rural to urban communities. These factors include: railroad, highway and airport transportation developments; the existence of a series of intersecting natural waterways, including the Anacostia River and other tributaries of the Potomac River; close proximity to (including partially shared borders with) the nation's capital; and its central location between two major population and commercial centers – Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the region that comprises the contemporary Anacostia Trails Heritage Area was predominately rural, like most of pre-twentieth century tobacco-growing Prince George's County and the state of Maryland. Yet, even before major transportation and commercial developments, and the growth of important towns and villages in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that are the central focus of this chapter, ATHA-related communities had garnered considerable social, economic and political significance in Prince George's County history and beyond.

As the nation's capital grew, its nearby suburbs did as well. In less than ten years, for instance, Montgomery and Prince George's counties grew from 20,000 in 1910 to 32,000, according to a report issued by the Washington

Suburban Sanitary Commission.²²⁵

By the late nineteenth century, the industrialization and urbanization, as well as related social and reform movements that gripped the United States, began to affect the social, political and economic development of Prince George's County, Maryland. In some cases, earlier than the rest of the United States, Washington, D.C., and its surrounding suburbs experienced the reforms and social changes that characterized the turn-of-the-twentieth century Progressive Era. Growing federal government input, as well as support for state and local projects that began during the Great Depression and New Deal era, had appeared decades earlier in ATHA communities. For instance, in 1918 the federal government authorized the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) to connect the Prince George's County, Montgomery County, and District of Columbia water systems to meet the water needs of the rising suburban population.

Historical Background

American troops' futile but courageous attempts during the August 1814 Battle of Bladensburg to stop British troops from attacking the White House during the War of 1812, coupled with Union troop efforts to combat Confederate soldiers at Fort Lincoln's Battery Jameson during the Civil War, conferred the ATHA town of Bladensburg with historic military and political significance and showed the continued linkage between ATHA and the nation's capital. Besides its early political and military importance, the area has been significant in the annals of local and regional African-American history, initially due to the large importation and use of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the tobacco-producing colony and then the state of Maryland. Prince George's County joined Calvert, Charles and St. Mary's counties, as the major region of tobacco production and slave labor in the state.²²⁶ By the closing decades of the eighteenth century, there were more than one million enslaved Africans and African Americans living in Maryland, and a smaller but sizable free black population. Most blacks worked as

²²⁵ General histories consulted for this chapter include: *Prince George's County Historic Sites and District Plan*, 1992; Linda Blachly, comp. *Bibliographical Resource Guide to Prince George's County, Maryland, Historical Literature*, Riverdale, MD: Prince George's County Historical Society, 1995; *The Neighborhoods of Prince George's County*. P. G. Community Renewal Program, 1974, Folio, Maryland Room (MR).

²²⁶ Bianca P. Floyd, *Black History & Historic Sites in Prince George's County*. Black History Study, History Division, M-NCPPC, 1983; *Black History Project Resource Guide*. M-NCPPC, 1990; *Highlights in Black History: Prince George's County Black History Study, Final Report*, M-NCPPC, 1984; *Records & Recollections: Early Black History in Prince George's County, Maryland*, MNCPPC, 1989. Susan G. Pearl, *African American Heritage Survey*, M-NCPPC. Alvin Thornton and Karen Williams Gooden, *Like A Phoenix I'll Rise: An Illustrated History of African Americans in Prince George's County, Maryland, 1696-1996*, The Donning Company, 1997.

agricultural laborers, although a small number were domestic servants, skilled craftsmen (i.e., carpenters, blacksmiths, brick masons), and factory workers. Members of the well-known Plummer family worked as enslaved craftsmen and house servants on a plantation located in the ATHA.²²⁷ Besides laboring in tobacco fields and slave owners' private homes, some enslaved men and women were hired out to work in private homes, mills, and iron factories. One of the most prominent slave trading merchants in Prince George's County was Christopher Lowndes of Bostwick, an historic site in the town of Bladensburg. Although outlawed in the state of Maryland in 1783, slave trading continued illegally until slavery was finally abolished in 1865.

While small in comparison to the slave population, the free black population played an important role in the state and region. Among the free blacks were the descendants of some of the area's most prominent whites, including the Calverts. Grouped together in small, tight-knit communities, free black residents of the area laid the foundation for established pre- and post-emancipation black community life. One of the oldest and largest free black communities in ATHA was located in Rossville, in the Vansville region of northern Prince George's County. Other substantial free black populations were located in other parts of the county and especially in the city of Baltimore.

Although located in a southern state, Maryland and, indeed, ATHA are strategically located between the "free" North and the "slave" South prompting historian Barbara Fields and others to refer to the state as the "middle ground."²²⁸ Its strategic location, with partially shared borders with Washington, D.C., has greatly influenced its economic, cultural, and physical development. One of the important aspects of the history of Prince George's County, the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, and indeed, the state of Maryland itself, has been the important role its black residents have played in its development.

Free black residents of Vansville and other ATHA towns and villages served as prominent leaders in black political and social life, beginning in the post-emancipation years. The transition from slavery to freedom for newly freed and previously free blacks was eased by the presence of established and newly built black churches, fraternal lodges, and schools. Despite the abolition of chattel slavery, blacks encountered continued discrimination and racial intimidation, which these organizations and northern white and black missionary and benevolent societies sought to alleviate.

²²⁷ See Nellie Arnold Plummer, *Out of the Depths*, 1927.

²²⁸ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985; Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland: A Middle Temperament, 1634-1980*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.

Besides churches, the major area of institutional development in post-emancipation black community life was the establishment of schools. A number of black schools were located in and around the city of Baltimore; however, there were some small poor black schools in scattered communities throughout the state. Predating the establishment of missionary, state, and federally supported schools for blacks, local blacks operated rudimentary schools in private homes and churches. One of the first schools to offer an education for blacks in ATHA to receive external support was located at Muirkirk. Prior to receiving assistance from the New England Association, a Boston-based benevolent organization, in April 1866, Charles Coffin, the owner of the iron furnace at Muirkirk, had established the school for the "black and white employees at the iron works."²²⁹

The same year (1866) the Freedmen's Bureau began to play an important role in African American education in the state of Maryland. Bladensburg was the site of the first Bureau school for black youth in Prince George's County. Like the Muirkirk and other schools in the region, a "school of sorts" already existed in Bladensburg, attended by approximately 50 students. Locally prominent black men assisted in the growth of black schools as either school trustees or as a "liaison" between the black community and Bureau officials. The Reverend John E. Lee, an African Methodist Episcopal minister, served as the Bureau liaison in Bladensburg.²³⁰

In the early part of the nineteenth century, the presence of large plantation owners and slave-trading American merchants in the region significantly contributed to the economic and cultural development of the county. The exploitation of the labor of enslaved women and men upon which these plantation owners and merchants depended played an important role in the county and state's economic development and the great wealth of some of its residents. As the century progressed, the region's central location between two major urban centers, Baltimore and Washington, D.C., with significant black populations and a wide array of established black churches, schools, and organizations, along with the growth in major industrial and transportation centers along the Anacostia River and tributaries, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and the Washington and Baltimore Turnpike, led to the development of small but significant pre-industrial/urban black communities in major ATHA towns and villages.

1880-1930: An Overview

By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the expansion of the

²²⁹ "Muirkirk Furnace," Inventory Form for State Historic Sites Survey, Maryland Historical Trust, 1974; Addendum, 1998.

²³⁰ Floyd, *Records and Recollections*, 28.

B & O Railroad, the Washington and Baltimore Turnpike (largely known as Route 1 since) and the spread of federal and Washington, D.C., workers seeking more affordable housing beyond the city's borders, helped to transform rural communities to suburban and eventually urban commercial and residential centers. The Anacostia Trails Heritage Area of today is a by-product of major transportation and communication developments, including a number of historic "firsts."

ATHA communities also experienced the same Progressive Era industrialization, urbanization and reform movements that dotted the-turn-of-the twentieth century urban American landscape. In an effort to effectively respond to a myriad of social and economic issues, residents in communities from Berwyn Heights and Hyattsville to North Brentwood and Bladensburg formed a broad range of civic, social, and reform organizations. In January 1915, for example, residents and property owners in Berwyn Heights formed the Berwyn Heights Association to address a number of neighborhood issues, ranging from street improvements to street lighting. In 1921, it succeeded, after several years of negotiation, in securing the electricity from PEPCO for home lighting and streetlights.²³¹

ATHA and the Transportation/Communication Revolution

The natural waterways that flow through many of the rural communities that comprise ATHA today, and ATHA's location between Washington, D.C., the new federal city, and the manufacturing city of Baltimore, meant that people in boats and on horseback, mules, and stagecoaches traveled through the rural countryside.

The Potomac River, the Anacostia River and its tributaries served as the first modes of transportation and fostered early commercial and residential settlements along its banks. Slow overland modes of transportation, mainly horse-and-buggies, greatly limited commercial development in outlying areas of ATHA until the early nineteenth century. The growth and expansion of overland transportation in the form of the railroad and highway development greatly expanded the area and size of both commercial and residential settlements along and beyond the waterways along the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers.

Along the overland (namely Route 1 and the Baltimore-Washington Turnpike, 1813) and waterway routes (Anacostia, Patuxent, and Potomac rivers and tributaries), taverns were built to provide food and comfort to travelers, including the Indian Queen Tavern in Bladensburg, Ross's Tavern (now Rossborough Inn) in College Park, the White House Tavern and its

²³¹ George D. Denny, Jr. *Proud Past, Promising Future: Cities and Towns in Prince George's County, Maryland*. Brentwood, MD: Dilden Company, 1997.

successor, Brown's Tavern, in northern College Park, and Van Horn (McCoy) Tavern in Vansville.²³²

From the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the development of new transportation routes and modes of transportation, coupled with the booming population growth in the nation's capital and the city of Baltimore, sparked commercial and residential growth in ATHA.

Old and new business enterprises developed along the new transportation routes, as did new residential towns and villages, while businesses along the turnpike began to suffer until the invention and widespread use of the automobile. For instance, Brown's Tavern operated until 1913, sometimes as rental units, under the direction of Almira Brown Mulloy, one of John W. Brown's daughters, following his death in 1862. The increase in automobile ownership and use in the 1920s/30s returned traffic and revived businesses along the Route 1 corridor, following the decline in the mid-19th century. The Route 1 highway that runs through most of the ATHA communities is considered part of the nation's "Main Street," as it was the major north-south corridor from Maine to Florida.

The growth in commercial and residential sites along the Baltimore-Washington Turnpike also occurred following the establishment of railroad and streetcar (trolley) lines in the region. Beginning in the 1830s, a line of the Baltimore-Ohio Railroad ran through the area, leading to new businesses and residential communities adjacent to railroad stations. The lines that ran from Baltimore to the District of Columbia promoted business, freight, and passenger travel between the two major metropolitan areas. The Age of the Railroad played a crucial role in the county's transition from predominantly agricultural and rural to commercial and suburban, and railroad development hastened the suburbanization of the ATHA communities adjacent to Baltimore and Ohio railroad stations, including Laurel, Beltsville, Riverdale Park, and Hyattsville.²³³ The last surviving example of the fine Victorian railroad stations along Prince George's County's B&O Railroad line was built in 1884 in Laurel, Maryland.

City-suburban travel between Washington and its adjacent suburbs was greatly enhanced by the building of regional trolley lines. In 1898, the two existing trolley companies merged to form the City and Suburban Railway Company. Following the end of World War I, a large part of the nation's wartime labor force remained in the Washington area. A large number

²³² "Brown's/White House Tavern," State Historic Sites Inventory form, Maryland Historical Trust, 1989.

²³³ Susan Pearl, "Railroads in Prince George's County, 1835-1935," *Historic Contexts in Prince George's County* (Upper Marlboro, MD: M-NCPPC Historic Preservation Section, June 1990/July 1991) 41-50, and Howard Berger in his essay, "Railroad Communities in Prince George's County, 1879-1940," in the same volume, 13-20.

relocated to more affordable, closeby ATHA suburban communities. The daily commute to work in Washington, D.C. was greatly facilitated by the trolley service; in the early twentieth century, the rise of the automobile led to even greater numbers of commuters locating here.

ATHA's contribution to the transportation and communication revolution extends beyond its strategic location and important overland modes of transportation connecting the two premier cities of Washington, D.C., and Baltimore to its pioneer place in aviation, from balloons and airplanes to aeronautics/space travel. While at the center of many transportation arteries—water, rail, trolley, and highway – in none of these did ATHA play such a pioneer role as it did in aviation history, regionally, nationally, as well as globally, including aeronautics. At the center of many of ATHA/Prince George's County aviation "firsts" has been the College Park Airport, currently the world's oldest continuously operated airport, founded in 1909.²³⁴

²³⁴ The preeminent role of the airport in aviation history is impressively captured in the exhibits of various airplanes and interpretive exhibits at the popular, interactive College Park Aviation Museum, and undoubtedly establishes ATHA as one of the major transportation centers in the United States, both historically and "futuristically." Cathy Wallace Allen, "History of College Park Airport," *Passport to the Past* 1 (September/Oct. 1990); Paul Garber, "Air Mail . . . How It Began," *History of U.S. Air Mail, 50th Anniversary, 1918-1960* (1968); Karin Thiessen, "Mail: The History of Its Taking Flight," *Passport to the Past* 6 (Spring 1995).



College Park Aviation Museum

The communities that comprise ATHA share a common pattern of housing types and residential development spurred by their proximity to the nation's capital and to transportation routes, which in the early twentieth

century included Route 1, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad line, the City and Suburban Railway Line, and the Anacostia, Patuxent, and Potomac rivers and tributaries.

While the major economic activity most people associate with Maryland and other southern states has been agricultural production, the region has also developed into a major commercial and industrial hub. The waterways that intersect ATHA, plus the development of overland routes and of the B & O railroad lines in the early nineteenth century led to the establishment of several important mills and associated buildings and residential developments.

The Adelphi Mill, located along the banks of the Northwest Branch of the Anacostia River, continued to be a center of the surrounding community. During the late nineteenth century the property, often referred to as the Riggs Mill, was owned by the Riggs banking family of Washington, D.C., and, in 1920, became the property of the McCormick-Goodhart family.



Adelphi Mill

Historic Communities, "Streetcar Suburbs", and Landmarks

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, communities began to

develop along the transportation corridor which is the principal spine of today's ATHA. Populations gravitated to cluster along the arteries of transportation, and settlements developed at the intersections of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad with major roads.

At the point where the B&O crossed over the right-of-way of the old Turnpike²³⁵, the Hyattsville community had begun to develop by the middle of the nineteenth century. Christopher C. Hyatt, who owned property in this area, built his brick mansion on the west side of the railroad, and opened a store directly across the tracks. In 1859, Hyatt was appointed postmaster of the new community which thenceforth was to bear his name. In 1873, Hyatt had a section of his property surveyed and platted into building lots; this roughly 20-acre area was known as Hyatt's Addition to Hyattsville, and it became the nucleus of Hyattsville's residential area.²³⁶ The developing town was described in 1878 as follows: "Hyattsville, on the Washington Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, is a beautiful village, tasteful houses in the modern style of architecture, ornamented with gardens and lawns, is largely indebted, for its prosperity, to Christopher C. Hyatt, . . . it has gradually increased in beauty and prosperity until it stands as one of the foremost villages between Baltimore and Washington."²³⁷ Hyatt's subdivision was followed by Wine and Johnson's Additions in 1882 and 1884; more and more fine late Victorian dwellings were constructed, the residential area gradually expanded, and the stores and shops along the line of the old Turnpike became the principal commercial complex in the region. The city of Hyattsville was incorporated in 1886.²³⁸

In 1887, 475 acres of the Riversdale plantation (including the mansion) were sold to a New York real estate syndicate which then began development of the suburb of Riverdale Park. Streets were laid out in a grid pattern, straddling the Washington line of the B& O which offered residents easy commuting into the Federal City; park spaces, and circles of green were provided in the plan, and parkland was reserved around the mansion which was preserved "as a sacred relic of an era replete with historic memories."²³⁹ In 1890, building of dwellings began, all of frame construction reflecting the popular taste of the period. By the turn of the century, the Riverdale Park suburb had approximately 60 dwellings, a church, school, and railroad station,

²³⁵The Washington and Baltimore Turnpike closed as a toll road in 1866, but continued to be the principal connector (now known as U.S. 1) between the two cities.

²³⁶E. R. McKean Map of Hyattsville, 1873, Library of Congress

²³⁷Lawrence, Dawson, "Historical Sketch of Prince George County, MD," G.M. Hopkins *Atlas of Fifteen Miles Around Washington Including the County of Prince George, Maryland*, Philadelphia 1878.

²³⁸City of Hyattsville: *Hyattsville, Our Hometown, 1886 to 1986*, Hyattsville, 1988

²³⁹Riverdale Park Real Estate promotional brochure, circa 1904; see National Historic Landmark nomination for Riversdale, 1997, page 27, 28.

and soon afterwards a group of commercial buildings grew up around the railroad depot. An additional section west of the Washington Baltimore Road was platted in 1906, and the Town of Riverdale was incorporated in 1920.²⁴⁰

At approximately the same time, in 1888, a group of speculators purchased 383 acres of land east of the old Turnpike and initiated development of a residential subdivision. Originally called Charlton Heights after one of the developers, the suburb was distinguished by its model houses, built from plans produced and distributed by Robert W. Shoppell's Cooperative Building Plan Association in New York. Many of these fine Victorian pattern-book houses, built in 1888 and 1889 to attract new residents, survive today. The community had as its western boundary the B&O tracks, offering easy commuting into Washington, D.C. Renamed Berwyn Heights, the community was incorporated in 1896.²⁴¹

Also at this time, another residential suburb was being developed on the northernmost section of the former Riversdale plantation acreage. In 1889, developer John O. Johnson purchased 125 acres from Calvert heir Ella Calvert Campbell, and platted the subdivision of College Park, bounded by the old Turnpike on the west and the B&O Railroad on the east. Many of the Victorian homes in this oldest section of present-day College Park were built for members of the faculty of the Maryland Agricultural College. College Park continued to grow with the construction through it of the streetcar line at the turn of the 20th century, and the subsequent expansion of the college after it was taken over by the State of Maryland in 1914. The town of College Park was incorporated in 1945.

In 1891, Captain Wallace A. Bartlett platted a subdivision on his Holladay Farm, which lay on the west side of the railroad tracks just south of Hyattsville. In the northern section of his subdivision, near the Northwest Branch, construction of dwellings began immediately, providing homes for black farmers and laborers some of whom had been associated with Bartlett by their service in the U. S. Colored Troops during the Civil War. White families, including that of Captain Bartlett, built homes in the southern section of the subdivision. The two connected communities had easy accessibility to the District of Columbia by means of the streetcar line which opened for service in 1898, and both communities were growing by the turn of the century. The southern section of the subdivision was incorporated as Brentwood in 1922; the northern section was incorporated as North Brentwood in 1924.²⁴²

The first subdivision of the area of Mount Rainier occurred in the early

²⁴⁰ The name of the Town was officially changed in 1998 to "Riverdale Park."

²⁴¹ Pearl, Susan G., *Victorian Pattern Book Houses in Prince George's County, M-NCPPC*, 1988.

²⁴² See *infra* for more detailed history of North Brentwood.

1890s, and development was just beginning by the end of that decade. Between 1900 and 1910, spurred by the opening of the streetcar line, eight different syndicates platted eight separate subdivisions in this area. Dwellings began to be erected for middle-class families who used the trolleys to commute into downtown Washington, and a busy commercial center grew up at the location of the trolley stop. The community grew quickly, and the city of Mount Rainier was incorporated in 1910.

Several companies had been chartered for the construction of streetcar lines between Washington and Baltimore. In 1897, trolley service began from the District Line at Mount Rainier (where settlement was just beginning) into the District of Columbia. In the next few years, this trolley line was extended by the City and Suburban Railway Company in a northeasterly direction through the developing suburbs of Prince George's County. It followed the line of Rhode Island Avenue extended, reaching the Brentwood subdivisions in 1898, and Hyattsville and Riverdale in 1899. After 1901, northerly extension of the line was undertaken by another company and completed in 1902 through College Park to Laurel. The advent of the streetcar line spurred further development in these northerly subdivisions, for example, Daniels Park and Hollywood, which are today within the corporate boundaries of College Park.²⁴³

Development of the land immediately east of Hyattsville began in the early years of the twentieth century. J. Harris Rogers, prominent scientist/inventor of Hyattsville, purchased land just north of Bladensburg's Spa Spring and within the loop of the mill race of the Calverts' Avalon Mill. It was platted in 1903. An adjoining section of land (Palestine Farm) was also platted in 1903 by Dr. Charles A. Wells of Hyattsville. Together these tracts were developed as East Hyattsville, and became a cross-section of a working-class community. The town was incorporated in 1924 as Edmonston, taking its name from the old north-south road which formed its eastern boundary, and which was named for members of the Edmonston family who had generations earlier owned land and managed plantations along its path.²⁴⁴

In 1923, a new subdivision was platted by the University Park Company on land which had throughout the nineteenth century been part of the Deakins family farm. This land was bounded on the north by College Park and the University campus, and on the south by Hyattsville. Characterized by curving drives and mature street trees, University Park is today an exclusively residential community; it was incorporated in 1936.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ See *Historic Contexts in Prince George's County*, essays on the streetcar lines and on the history of the Route One Corridor.

²⁴⁴ Pearl, Susan G., *Edmonston Historical Survey*, M-NCPPC, 1993

²⁴⁵ Berger, Howard S., National Register nomination for University Park, M-NCPPC, 1989.

This area continued to develop during the early years of the twentieth century. One major change took place at the grade crossing in Hyattsville, where the old Turnpike road intersected the B&O Railroad. As automobile traffic increased, more and more accidents occurred at this grade crossing, and by the mid-1920s, it was determined that something had to be done to improve the situation. It was decided to build a viaduct over the railroad tracks, and at the same time to construct a roadway which would run directly from Hyattsville into the District of Columbia, west of the B&O Railroad and along the line of the City and Suburban trolley tracks. This new roadway incorporated part of the streetcar right-of-way, and several stretches of roadway in the Mount Rainier, Brentwood and North Brentwood subdivisions were improved, connected and extended to become Rhode Island Avenue. The avenue opened to considerable celebration in December 1929, and traffic was soon diverted to it from the original route which ran through Bladensburg. Once again the town of Bladensburg was bypassed by this new road construction, as it had been by the construction of the railroad nearly a century earlier. Service on the trolley line continued until 1958, and Rhode Island Avenue was widened to accommodate increased automobile traffic. The new communities continued to grow.

Most of the communities that were developing as the nineteenth century rolled into the twentieth were settled by white families, but at the same time several important African-American communities were forming.

The African American Presence

A number of factors contributed to the large presence of blacks in certain ATHA communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: remnants of black presence in antebellum slave quarters; deliberate post-emancipation/Jim Crow residential segregation practices, including restricting blacks to undesirable parcels of land; and proximity to job sites. The black towns and villages in ATHA often resembled patterns of residential Jim Crow segregation found elsewhere in the United States.

Throughout the history of Prince George's County, the lives of blacks have been richly interwoven in the political, social, economic, and cultural tapestry of ATHA and other county communities. As elsewhere in the colony and then the state of Maryland, blacks from various parts of West Africa were forceably brought to labor as field hands on tobacco farms as well as domestic and personal servants, and skilled craftsmen and women on slave plantations. One of the best accounts of life on an ATHA plantation is Nellie Plummer's family biography *Out of the Depths*, an account of her family's work and life on the Riversdale Plantation. The biography is largely based on the diary her

father, Adam Plummer, kept while a slave on the plantation.²⁴⁶

Scattered residential communities of African Americans have existed historically throughout the region. These communities represent a significant part of the important history of black institutional and community building in ATHA, Prince George's County and the state of Maryland. However elsewhere in Prince George's County and in ATHA, in particular, blacks were instrumental in the organizational and institutional development of more racially diverse communities. In Bladensburg, black residents, led by former slave Sarah Miranda Plummer founded the St. Paul Baptist congregation in 1866.²⁴⁷ Plummer was part of the Adam and Emily Plummer family, who had been slaves for the Calvert plantation at Riversdale and the Hilleary family at Three Sisters Plantation some six miles to the southeast. Her story is exceptional in that she was a member of a literate slave family and was successfully reunited with her family members after being sold to a New Orleans slave owner just before slavery ended.

After having met for several years in the Plummer home in Bladensburg, in 1874, the black Baptist congregation she founded was able to purchase the building on 47th Street that had served as the home of the white Presbyterian congregation of Bladensburg since 1818. The building was renamed St. Paul Baptist Church; in 1908, black worshippers remodeled and made additions to the original building.

In the immediate post-emancipation years, large numbers of blacks migrated to Washington, D.C., and other urban communities throughout the South. Indeed, Washington, D.C., as the seat of the federal government and home of the "Great Emancipator," Abraham Lincoln, attracted former slaves as well as formerly free blacks. As the local Washington, D.C., population grew with the expansion of the federal work force and housing costs rose, there began a slow but steady out-migration from the city to adjacent suburbs in Prince George's County.

Three prominent ATHA communities, North Brentwood, Lakeland, and Rossville, are historically black communities. Many residents today are African American and are descendants of some of the original residents. While decades apart in their establishment, the practice of subdividing land to create black settlement helped to explain the existence of these black communities. North Brentwood was the first and only incorporated black municipality in ATHA, and its residents' influence extended beyond its

²⁴⁶ Nellie Arnold Plummer, *Out of the Depths*; Bianca P. Floyd, "The Plummers: Portrait of a Black American Family, Prince George's County, Maryland," *Highlights in Black History*, M-NCPPC, 1984.

²⁴⁷ "St. Paul's/Free Hope Baptist Church," State Historic Sites Inventory Form, MD Historical Trust, 1988; 1996.

borders and Prince George's County.²⁴⁸

North Brentwood

In 1887 Wallace A. Bartlett, captain of Company I of the Nineteenth U.S. Regiment of Colored Troops, purchased 206 acres of farmland just outside Washington, D.C. Along with his partners in the newly formed Holladay Land and Improvement Company, Captain Bartlett sold plots in the northern section of this new subdivision to black families; tradition maintains that this was in honor of the courageous service and loyalty he had experienced from black soldiers during the Civil War.

Publicity about this attractive suburban community of blacks, just across the line from Washington, D.C., led Civil War veterans, including a number who attended a reunion in Washington, D.C. in September 1892, and other blacks, often related to war survivors, who wanted to become landowners in this suburban community that became the town of North Brentwood. Among the first families to purchase lots in the early-1890s were the Randalls, including Henry Randall and his son, Peter. The first five houses built in the new community were for members of the Randall family, and the community was for many years known as Randalltown.

The fact that much of the land in the newly created subdivision was located in the floodplain from the Northwest Branch and the mill race from Moyers' mill meant that most whites were neither interested in buying property in the northern section nor opposed to the land sales to black families. Also during the 1890s, white families purchased lots from Bartlett's company in the southern section of the new subdivision that became known as Brentwood.²⁴⁹

Based upon the rationale that Moyers' mill was "inoperable," Bartlett employed early Randallstown residents to dig ditches to divert water from the mill race, hoping to prevent the accumulation of unsanitary water, to prevent further flooding, and to turn "swampland" into fertile land for planting and development. Bartlett successfully defended his rather unorthodox actions in court, in response to an injunction Moyers brought against him. However, flooding remained a problem in the Randalltown/North Brentwood subdivision, even after Moyers' mill closed, until the Bladensburg Pumping Station was built in 1954.

²⁴⁸ Floyd, Bianca P. *Records & Recollections: Early Black History in Prince George's County, Maryland*. MNCPPC, 1989.

²⁴⁹ George D. Denny, Jr. *Proud Past, Promising Future: Cities and Towns in Prince George's County, Maryland*, Brentwood, MD: Dilden Company, 1997. Susan G. Pearl, *Historical Survey, Brentwood, Maryland*, M-NCPPC, 1991; *Historical Survey, North Brentwood, Maryland*, MNCPPC Planning Dept., 1991. Joseph Saunders, *North Brentwood: The First Black Incorporated Town in Prince George's County*, 1992. Frank Harold Wilson, *Footsteps from North Brentwood*, 1993.

In the opening decade of the twentieth century, land sales to blacks in the northern part of the subdivision outpaced those in the southern section to whites. By 1905, the Randalltown community included approximately 65 residents, living in 22 dwellings. These early black residents formed political and social organizations and institutions to improve their lives and to assist in the growth and development of their community despite its small size. The home building explosion during the opening decades of the twentieth century led to the establishment of churches, schools, small businesses, and social and civic organizations by the town's black residents. A one-room frame school opened in 1902 on the site Bartlett originally platted for it a decade earlier. Henry and Peter Randall were appointed trustees of the school. It was not until 1924 that the Board of Education approved a new, three-room school for North Brentwood. The new school, partially supported by the Rosenwald School Fund, was a result of the activism of local residents, especially Mrs. M. F. Wiggington-Brown, who in 1920 had been appointed Supervisor of Colored Schools for Prince George's County.

Shortly after the first school was built, Brentwood residents succeeded in establishing two church communities. In 1905, the Baptist congregation formed; two years later, the first Baptist Church was built. The local Methodists met and, in 1913, formed a congregation, holding their initial services in the Firemen's Hall. The first Methodist church in North Brentwood, the Brentwood African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church, under the direction of the Reverend Chesterfield Jackson was built in 1920 on the south side of John Street.²⁵⁰ The land for the building was sold to them by Isaac Arnold, a white resident of the southern section, who had purchased the land on the white side of John Street to sell to the AMEZ church trustees.

²⁵⁰ "Brentwood African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church," State Historic Sites Inventory Form, Maryland Historical Trust, 1985.



North Brentwood AMEZ Church

Besides schools and churches, growing communities need businesses to meet the needs of local residents and to attract newcomers. A few of the early businesses in the Randalltown/North Brentwood community were a coal, wood and ice supply company, owned and operated by “first resident” Henry Randall and, later by Ellis (Babe) Smith, and a small dairy farm owned by the Jerome Hawkins family.

To promote community development and promote civic activism among the town’s residents, William J. Conway, who relocated to Randalltown from the District of Columbia in 1905, described the area he encountered as “one of the most pitiful-looking villages he had ever seen.” To promote and sustain civic activism and to improve the community’s social, educational, cultural, and financial future, William Conway and others established the Brentwood Colored Citizens Association. The all-male members of the original Directors board, besides Conway who also served as president until 1911, were Frank H. Vaden, John W. Banks, Richard A. Wood, and John H. Thomas.

Many of the developments that residents of North Brentwood witnessed in the early twentieth century can be attributed largely to the outstanding work of the members and leaders of the Brentwood Colored Citizens Association. The association succeeded in securing firefighting apparatus and electric streetlights, and actively supported the movement

toward incorporation. Two of the most community-minded residents of North Brentwood were Jeremiah Hawkins and his wife, Emma Quander Hawkins, who moved to the area in 1905.

Despite the local civic activism of both Jeremiah and Emma Hawkins and others, only black men had the right to vote according to the 15th amendment, ratified in 1870. Even then very few black men held any major elected or appointed positions in the Republican Party or in Prince George's County politics. William Beckett, a miller and resident of Bladensburg, Maryland, could not have anticipated the dire political situation for the newly enfranchised black. Just a few short months after the ratification of the black male suffrage amendment, Beckett ran on the Republican ticket for a position on the Bladensburg Town Commission. He lost, but is significant for having been the "first" Black man to run for public office in Prince George's County and, for that matter, in the state of Maryland.

Jeremiah Hawkins was civically active even before he came to North Brentwood in 1905. In 1887, he became a delegate to the county Republican Party convention. Two years later, he was appointed one of the county delegates to the Republican State Central Committee. Yet, it was not until 1920 (ironically, the year the nineteenth amendment was ratified giving women the right to vote) that Hawkins's political recognition extended beyond Prince George's County Republican circles when he was elected the first black delegate to the National Republican Party convention.

Locally, he remained a major figure in the life of North Brentwood. When William Conway retired as president of the Brentwood Colored Citizens Association, Hawkins became its president, serving from 1911 to 1922. He played a major role in the community's overall progress, especially spearheading the town's successful campaign to become incorporated. Two years after he ended his term as civic association head, the town of North Brentwood became the first incorporated municipality of black residents in Prince George's County. Not surprisingly, Hawkins was elected as the first mayor of North Brentwood, making him the first black person to become a mayor in the history of Prince George's County.

Located along the City and Suburban Railway Company trolley line, the incorporated town of Brentwood became a much sought after neighborhood for both city and suburban blacks in search of convenient, affordable housing. North Brentwood residents made important contributions to the organizational and institutional development of their immediate community and other communities within ATHA and Prince George's County, Maryland. The history of its formation and close proximity to the nation's capital helped to explain its large and civic-minded black middle-class and working-class population.

Lakeland

Further north along the Route 1 corridor, Lakeland came into existence as a black community in the 1890s.²⁵¹ As with other subdivisions largely comprising African Americans, residents immediately went to work to build and develop organizations and institutions to improve their lives. By 1903, three black male residents of Lakeland had been appointed “Colored School” trustees and a one-room schoolhouse for “colored” youth was built. Twenty-four years later, with support from the Rosenwald funds, a large elementary school was built. In 1928, two years after the Rosenwald elementary school opened at Lakeland, the Community High School (also known as Lakeland School) opened its doors to 45 eighth and ninth grade students and two teachers. At that time it was the first and only high school for blacks in ATHA and one of the first three public high schools for blacks in Prince George’s County.

Rossville

Located on old Muirkirk Road in Laurel, the small residential settlement of Rossville was populated by local blacks, many of them laborers at the nearby Muirkirk Iron Furnace. The community’s original residents bought lots, and wasted no time in establishing important institutions and organizations to meet its needs. Queen’s Chapel had preceded the community, having been built here in 1868 to hold worship services. Besides religious services, this log chapel, named after one of its original founders Thomas Queen, offered a meeting place for local blacks. Not only did many of the black residents work at Muirkirk, but their children also attended the elementary school that the factory established for them. Despite its small size and population, Rossville’s rich organizational life resembled other late nineteenth and early twentieth century ATHA communities, as well as other communities in Maryland and throughout United States at the turn of the twentieth century. The earliest lot, at the center of the Rossville community was purchased by Rebecca Lodge #6 of the Benevolent Sons and Daughters of Abraham, a late nineteenth century benevolent society that had formed to meet the financial needs of its members during sickness and the death of a family member. Like other African- American benevolent societies, it resembled modern day insurance companies, but unlike insurance companies, benevolent societies also attempted to address the social, civic, and religious needs of the community.²⁵²

To have a place for the society members and others in the community

²⁵¹ Floyd, *Records & Recollections*.

²⁵² Susan Pearl, “Rossville,” *African American Heritage Survey*, M-NCPPC.

to meet, the members of the Rebecca Lodge built Abraham Hall in 1889.²⁵³ It remains today as the only African-American historic site in Prince George's County to have received both local and state support for its restoration and preservation.

²⁵³ "Abraham Hall," State Historic Sites Inventory Form, Maryland Historical Trust, 1983; Marsha L. Brown, "Abraham Hall: A New Beginning," *Passport to the Past* 2 (Jan./Feb. 1991).

CHAPTER FIVE

ATHA, 1920-1945: HERE COME THE FEDS

Bruce A. Thompson

In the Election of 1920 Republican presidential candidate Warren G. Harding called for a “return to normalcy.” It was a call to end the disruptions associated with not only World War I but also the reforms of Progressivism. Harding sensed that the American people were tired of change. It was time for government at all levels to step back and quit interfering with business and the lives of people. Albert C. Ritchie, elected to his first of four terms as Governor of Maryland in 1920, could not have agreed more. He sought to impose his strong states’ rights philosophy and proclivity for fiscal restraint. Thus, maintaining the *status quo* and limiting the role of the federal government’s impact on people’s lives became goals for the interwar period in Maryland and, by extension, the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA) in northern Prince George’s County. Holding back change and the federal government, however, would prove to be a futile effort.

Return to Normalcy

At the state level, conservative politics – typified by states’ rights and fiscal restraint – would be the rule throughout the interwar and WWII period. Gov. Ritchie used this approach to build upon his political base in Baltimore. Ritchie had graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1896, and then studied law at the University of Maryland. He had a private law practice and subsequently served with Baltimore’s solicitor’s office, the state Public Service Commission, and then as Attorney General. Ritchie barely defeated (165 controversial votes) Republican Harry W. Nice for the governorship in 1920. He did not relinquish the post until 1935.²⁵⁴

Gov. Ritchie opposed prohibition and women’s suffrage, calling them violations of states’ rights. Although the Maryland legislature approved the

²⁵⁴Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland: A Middle Temperate, 1634-1980* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 451; Richard Walsh and William Lloyd Fox, *Maryland: A History, 1632-1974* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1974), 672-674. For more on Albert Ritchie, see James B. Levin, “Albert C. Ritchie, A Political Biography” (Ph.D. dissertation, City College of New York, 1970).

18th Amendment (Prohibition), Ritchie refused to enforce it, and Baltimore was widely known to be wet and a major distribution center for the east coast. The Maryland legislature agreed with Ritchie regarding women's suffrage and did not ratify the 19th Amendment until 1941.²⁵⁵

Throughout his time as governor, Ritchie remained vigilant in his defense of states' rights and tight state spending. He gained state and national support, even vying with Franklin Delano Roosevelt for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1932, for making Maryland a model of state government. The Great Depression tested Ritchie's values. As historian Robert Brugger observed, "Sheer necessity forced the issue of government involvement in relief."²⁵⁶ Ritchie conceded that the federal government had more resources with which to combat the Depression. Thus, the New Deal entered Maryland, but Ritchie limited the federal government's impact by avoiding dollar-matching programs. His successor, Republican Harry W. Nice (1935-1939), promised full support of the New Deal but the Maryland legislature refused to authorize the necessary funds. Democratic Governor Herbert O'Connor (1939-1947) endorsed the New Deal, but his support was guarded and tempered by his commitment to the fiscal conservatism that Gov. Ritchie had practiced.²⁵⁷

The Democratic leaders in Prince George's County emulated the state politicians. Lansdale G. Sasscer, a courtly gentleman who embodied the politics of the Old South, was the acknowledged leader in Prince George's politics from the 1930s until his death in 1964. He held office as a state senator in the 1920s and 1930s, serving as president of the senate for several years, and then was elected to the U.S. Congress, 1938 to 1950. His real power, however, came not from his offices but rather from the acknowledged favoritism that fueled politics in Prince George's County. He personally did not benefit from the favors, and was perceived as an honest broker.²⁵⁸

His major economic supporter was T. Howard Duckett, a banker from Hyattsville. Duckett founded the Suburban Trust Company, which provided loans and political advice to developers and industrialists. He never held political office, but he did sit on influential boards such as the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC). The WSSC was organized in 1918 to investigate a typhoid epidemic and to ensure pure water for both Montgomery and Prince George's counties. The M-NCPPC was created in

²⁵⁵Suzanne Ellery Greene Chapelle et al., *Maryland: A History of Its People* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 222-223; Brugger 468; Walsh and Fox 677-680.

²⁵⁶Brugger 506.

²⁵⁷Brugger 564; Chapelle 243.

²⁵⁸George H. Callcott, *Maryland & America, 1940 to 1980* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 23; Alan Virta, *Prince George's County: A Pictorial History* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company, 1998), 231; Walsh and Fox 774.

1927 to form a master plan for land usage in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. Armed with state authority to use 10 percent of the property tax from each county, the commission established zoning and purchased land for public parks.²⁵⁹

By 1920, most of Prince George's County was still rural with farming as the primary occupation. Low demand and overproduction of corn and wheat kept the prices depressed throughout the 1920s. Tobacco remained the number one crop. The drought of 1929/1930 improved market conditions, but, of course, most farmers had no crop left to sell and many were forced out of business. Through February 1934, there were almost two thousand foreclosure sales recorded in the Prince George's County courthouse. WWI had given Maryland tobacco a modest boost. The war interrupted the supply of quick-burning Arabic and Turkish tobacco used by cigarette manufacturers. Maryland tobacco proved to be an adequate and less expensive alternative. Tobacco prices fluctuated but remained strong into the 1930s. Obviously, the Great Depression did nothing to improve the farmers' situation. WWII increased the demand for all farm products, but labor shortages plagued production. Retired farmers, women and children, farm-service exempt men, German prisoners of war, and blacks from the British Caribbean all worked on local farms. Farming remained a staple of Prince George's economy.²⁶⁰

The population in Prince George's County had grown incrementally since the Civil War. It was mostly white and rural. The folks living in the suburban neighborhoods of ATHA were linked to Washington, D.C., and this connection would become even tighter in the interwar and WWII period. In 1933, for example, there were approximately 63,000 jobs in D.C.; by 1940, there were about 166,000. Correspondingly, the population in Prince George's County jumped from roughly 60,000 in 1930 to 90,000 in 1940, with most of the growth concentrated in the ATHA corridor. For the moment, the suburban housing and other effects of population growth were controlled within a contained area.²⁶¹

Another visible change involved historic preservation. It started with the construction of the Peace Cross in Bladensburg at the junction of Alternate U.S. 1 and Maryland 450. The cross, built between 1919 and 1925, honored the Prince George's countians who fell during World War I. The establishment of Fort Lincoln Cemetery in 1919 provided a burial place, but it also preserved the historic sites within its grounds. Historical markers in the cemetery indicate the border between Maryland and Washington, D.C., the holding action of Commodore Joshua Barney and his men on August 24, 1814, during the Battle of Bladensburg, and Battery Jameson erected during the Civil War

²⁵⁹Ibid. See www.mncppc.org for the organization's current operations.

²⁶⁰Chapelle 232; Fox and Walsh, 703-704; Brugger 460, 495, and 536.

²⁶¹Virta 212.

as part of D.C.'s defenses.²⁶²

An administrative change that had long-term implications was the creation of the University of Maryland. In 1856, Charles Benedict Calvert conveyed to the State a portion of his Riversdale plantation to establish an agricultural college; by 1920, the older and private University of Maryland professional schools in Baltimore needed a financial bailout, and, after being rebuffed by several private schools, turned to the Maryland Agricultural College in College Park. Both institutions agreed to a merger and applied to the state for funding. Gov. Ritchie, a graduate and faculty member at the law school, sought to control spending and had several budget battles with the university's first president, Albert Woods, who sought to improve the faculty. Woods' successor, Raymond Pearson (1926-1935), met similar resistance while focusing on a building program. The arrival of Harry C. "Curley" Byrd (1935-1954), a superb fund-raiser and promoter, and the departure of Gov. Ritchie in 1935 boded well for the university and for the community of College Park, which became a center for higher education and research within the state.²⁶³

So, despite the conservative heritage of Prince George's County, there were some small changes – suburban growth, historic preservation, and the University of Maryland – within ATHA. The interwar period and WWII, however, would also bring fundamental challenges to the *status quo*. The two most profound challenges came from the early civil rights movement and the arrival of the federal government.

Challenging Segregation as a Way of Life

With the demise of slavery in 1865 via the 13th Amendment, the United States debated what would become of the freedmen. Radical Republicans called for first-class citizenship with full political and civil rights equal to whites. Moderate Republicans and southern Democrats preferred some sort of second-class status. The demise of Reconstruction in 1877 left the decision in the hands of individual states. Segregation, with limited rights for African Americans, became a way of life and the nation's official racial policy in 1896 with *Plessy v. Ferguson* which established the principle of separate-but-equal.²⁶⁴

²⁶²Earl Arnett, Robert J. Brugger, and Edward C. Papenfuse, *Maryland: A New Guide to the Old Line State*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 399; "Fort Lincoln Cemetery," Inventory Form for State Historic Sites Survey, Maryland Historical Trust, Crownsville, MD.

²⁶³Fox and Walsh 729. For a detailed study of the University of Maryland's history, see George Callcott, *A History of the University of Maryland* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1966).

²⁶⁴Two leading interpretations for the onset of segregation are C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980 [1951]) and Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980). For

Efforts to implement segregation in Maryland included the ousting of two black students from the University of Maryland Law School, disenfranchisement attempts, and emergence of the Baltimore Plan – a model for cities to legislate segregated housing.²⁶⁵ One manifestation was the establishment of separate African American communities. In northern Prince George's County, the newer communities of Rossville, Lakeland, and North Brentwood joined older black communities in Laurel and Bladensburg.

Churches, schools, and fraternal lodges were pillars of the local black communities. New construction in the post-WWI years strengthened these institutions and the communities they served. Every black community had at least one church anchoring it, with three communities erecting new buildings in the early 1920s:

St. Paul's Baptist in Bladensburg (1873) – a congregation organized in 1866 by a former slave named Sarah Miranda Plummer purchased the building from a white Presbyterian church in 1873. The building was damaged by fire in 1908 and soon thereafter restored and enlarged. A new church, Free Hope Baptist, took occupancy in 1973.²⁶⁶

A.M.E. Zion in North Brentwood (1920) – started in 1913 in the home of Henson Primrose, the congregation moved to the Firemen's Hall before occupying its own building. The church was officially incorporated in 1921 as "African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Brentwood, Maryland."²⁶⁷

Embry A.M.E. in Lakewood (1920) – organized in 1903, this congregation originally met in private homes. A small chapel was built in 1905, and a larger church building was constructed in 1920. Sanctuary renovations and construction of a parish hall followed.²⁶⁸

more on Reconstruction and black civil rights, see Herman Belz, *Emancipation and Equal Rights: Politics and Constitutionalism in the Civil War Era* (New York: Norton, 1978); John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); and Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

²⁶⁵David Skillen Bogen, "The First Integration of the University of Maryland School of Law," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 84 (Spring 1989): 39-49; Margaret Law Callcott, *The Negro in Maryland Politics, 1870-1912* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), chap. 1; and Garrett Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordinances of 1910-1913," *Maryland Law Review* 42 (1983): 289-328.

²⁶⁶Susan G. Pearl, *African American Heritage Survey, 1996* (Upper Marlboro, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1996), 38.

²⁶⁷Ibid. 32. See also Bianca P. Floyd, *Records & Recollections: Early Black History in Prince George's County, Maryland* (Prince George's County, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1989).

²⁶⁸Inventory of African American Historical and Cultural Resources, Prince George's County, Maryland, http://www.sailor.lib.md.us/docs/af_am/princeco.html.

Queen's Chapel Methodist Episcopal in Rossville (1868) – the oldest African-American congregation in northern Prince George's County, Queen's Chapel's original building burned in the late 1890s. A new frame structure was erected in 1901, and a larger brick building in 1953.²⁶⁹

St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal in Laurel (1921) – starting in 1891, the congregation met for its first thirty years in Hebron Hall. St. Mark's erected its own building in 1921 and added a fellowship hall in 1979.²⁷⁰

Besides churches, new schools were being built in the African-American communities. Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, established a fund to build schools for African American children in the South. Twenty-three Rosenwald schools were built in Prince George's County during the 1920s. Of the five originally built within ATHA, two Rosenwald school buildings still remain:

Muirkirk School (1920s) – the owners of Muirkirk Furnace started a school in 1867 for the children of its employees. White students attended in the morning and African-American students attended in the afternoon. The next year the African-American students moved their school to Queen's Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church, where it stayed until the church burned in the late 1890s. The school moved to Abraham Hall until a Rosenwald school was built in Rossville in 1922. The school closed in 1950 and is now occupied by American Legion Post 235.²⁷¹

Lakeland High School (1928) – also called Community High School, Lakeland was one of the first high schools for African Americans in Prince George's County. It served African-American communities in Bladensburg, North Brentwood, Lakeland, Muirkirk/Rossville, and Laurel. Centrally located, students rode buses and rail or walked to this school. Later it served as a junior high, a local elementary school, and a Special Education Center before becoming a Korean Catholic mission.²⁷²

²⁶⁹Pearl 21-22.

²⁷⁰Pearl 115.

²⁷¹Inventory of African American Historical and Cultural Resources. Three other Rosenwald schools (Lakeland Primary, Laurel Primary, and [North] Brentwood Primary) were built within ATHA but no longer survive.

²⁷²Ibid. and Pearl 116.

The others were Lakeland Primary School, Laurel Primary School, and Brentwood (actually North Brentwood) Primary School. African Americans who wanted to become teachers or enter other professions could choose between Bowie State Normal College in northern Prince George's County or Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Segregation also led African-American communities to develop their own forms of recreation. Of particular prominence in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s was sandlot baseball. Local communities developed and supported their own teams. The players and their fans would travel to "away" games on Sunday afternoons. The Brentwood Flashes and Lakeland Giants, among others, played for community pride and remained a major recreational outlet until 1957 when the Tri-State League formed. This league played semi-professional ball and its teams were recruited from the region, thereby undermining the viability of the community-level teams.²⁷³

By the 1930s, segregation was an integral part of the rhythm of life for whites and African Americans in Prince George's County, indeed throughout Maryland and the South. Segregation, also called "Jim Crow," had become a prison that confined African Americans to second-class citizenship. Thus, it is not surprising that William N. Jones in the Baltimore *Afro-American* went so far as to call segregation the "greatest enemy of mankind" and the removal of segregation was seen as the key to equal political and civil rights. Black Marylanders would team with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to launch the civil rights movement, a reform movement that aimed to eliminate segregation.²⁷⁴

Charles Houston, special counsel for the NAACP, came to Baltimore and told the City Wide Young People's Forum that together they could "sue Jim Crow out of Maryland."²⁷⁵ The NAACP would provide the attorneys and legal strategy, and the Forum would provide the plaintiff and community support. Forum member Donald Murray stepped forward as the plaintiff and applied to the University of Maryland Law School in Baltimore. The University of Maryland, after the merger in 1920 of the professional schools in Baltimore and the agricultural college in College Park, stood as a bastion of white supremacy that overwhelmed the historically black colleges (none of which offered law) in the state.²⁷⁶ As anticipated, the University denied

²⁷³Gail Thomas, "Rough Diamonds: The Mid-Atlantic Negro Leagues and Sandlot Heroes," http://www.inform.umd.edu/UMS+State/MD_Resources/counties/PG/PG300/rough.html.

²⁷⁴This interpretation can be found in Bruce A. Thompson, "The Civil Rights Vanguard: The NAACP and the Black Community in Baltimore, 1931-1942" (University of Maryland at College Park, 1996). Jones' comments can be found in "Day By Day," Baltimore *Afro-American*, 25 March 1933, 6.

²⁷⁵Juanita Jackson Mitchell, interview by Bruce A. Thompson, 23 May 1991, Baltimore, tape recording, in author's possession.

²⁷⁶For more on the University of Maryland, see George H. Callcott, *A History of the University of Maryland* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1966).

Murray admission to the law school, and in 1935 the NAACP filed suit (*Murray v. Pearson*) on his behalf. Raymond Pearson, president of the University of Maryland, stated plainly under oath that Murray was denied admission because of race. Charles Houston argued that this was a violation of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision and the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Judge Eugene O'Dunne agreed with Houston and ordered the University of Maryland Law School to admit Murray immediately.²⁷⁷

Unfortunately, the Murray case opened only the Law School. The University of Maryland refused to desegregate the other parts of the university. The State of Maryland even purchased Morgan College in Baltimore in 1939 to provide an undergraduate alternative for black Marylanders. This supplemented the historically black college (Princess Anne on the Eastern Shore, Coppin in Baltimore, and Bowie State²⁷⁸ in Prince George's County) that already existed. Higher education would remain separate and unequal for two more decades. In fact, the NAACP had to initiate several legal suits in the late 1940s and early 1950s to desegregate the University of Maryland's professional schools and graduate school. The undergraduate school at the University of Maryland in College Park did not open to blacks until the 1950s, after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) overturned *Plessy* and the notion of separate-but-equal. Nevertheless, *Murray v. Pearson* had showed that the law could be used as a tool to attack segregation, and the NAACP would press its case for the next twenty years.

While Houston was in other states trying to open other professional schools and win additional precedents,²⁷⁹ his student, Thurgood Marshall, remained behind to explore other avenues. Working with the revitalized

²⁷⁷Primary records can be found at Harry Clifton "Curley" Byrd Papers, Special Collections, University of Maryland at College Park Libraries, College Park, MD; NAACP Papers, I-C-85, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; and *Murray v. Pearson*, Baltimore City Court (Court Papers), Series C 174-2, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, MD. For interpretations of *Murray v. Pearson*, see Sylvia M. Seawright, "The First Legal Challenge to 'Separate But Equal' Education: The NAACP during the 1930s" (M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, 1970); Sylvia M. Seawright, "Desegregation at Maryland: The NAACP and the Murray Case in the 1930's," *Maryland Historian* 1 (1970): 59-73; Edward J. Kuebler, "The Desegregation of the University of Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 71 (Spring 1976): 37-49; and Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 187-95.

²⁷⁸ Located in the town of Bowie, just south of ATHA, Bowie State College (now University) is Maryland's oldest historically black college. Founded in 1865, Bowie State specialized in training teachers for the segregated school system in Maryland.

²⁷⁹With the *Gaines* decision in 1938, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that each state practicing segregation had to provide separate and equal law schools, and by implication separate and equal school systems from top to bottom. Segregated education was going to become very expensive, and Houston had a national legal precedent to attack current practice. For a description of Houston's activities in the 1930s and 1940s, see Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) and Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP Legal Strategy against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

Baltimore Branch of the NAACP, Marshall sought to get African American students admitted to one of the eleven white high schools in Baltimore; the effort failed in his first solo civil rights case because he picked a plaintiff who was not eligible for relief.²⁸⁰

Next, Marshall launched a statewide teachers' salary equalization campaign. As Table 1 shows, Maryland's state law required minimum salaries for white teachers that were nearly double those for African-American teachers.

Table 1. *Legal Minimum Salaries of Maryland County Teachers, 1937*²⁸¹

Elementary Schools		High Schools	
White (10 months)	Colored (9 months)	White (10 months)	Colored (9 months)
\$ 600	\$ 360	\$1,150	\$ 720

The Baltimore NAACP, led by Lillie Mae Jackson, and the Maryland Educational Association, the black teachers' organization headed by Enolia Pettigen, raised money and found plaintiffs for Marshall. Teachers financed the salary equalization campaign by contributing five dollars to the Joint Committee that oversaw the campaign and by joining their local NAACP branch. To encourage teachers to risk their careers, the Joint Committee agreed to pay one year's salary to any teacher who lost his/her job because he/she was a plaintiff. The campaign was almost too successful, however, producing out-of-court settlements that equalized salaries in 9 of Maryland's 23 counties but no legal precedent.²⁸²

Nicholas Orem, School Superintendent of Prince George's County, however, had no intention of paying African-American teachers the same salaries as white teachers. Prince George's County employed about 360 white teachers and 93 African-American teachers. Orem believed that African-American teachers, despite holding first-class certificates, received inferior

²⁸⁰W. Edward Orser, "Neither Separate Nor Equal: Foreshadowing *Brown* in Baltimore County, 1935-1937," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 92 (Spring 1997): 5-35.

²⁸¹"Nice Seeks to Equalize Teachers' Pay," *Baltimore Sun*, 29 December 1937, NAACP Papers, I-D-90.

²⁸²"Report to the Joint Committee American Fund for Public Service, Inc., and the N.A.A.C.P." May 4, 1937, NAACP Papers I-C-198; Horace Mann Bond, "Few Teachers Ever Test the School Laws," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 24, 1932, 20. See also Thompson, "Vanguard of the Civil Rights Movement," chap. 7, and Bruce A. Thompson, "Segregated Salaries: The Struggle to Equalize Teachers' Salaries in Frederick County," in *Crossroads in Mid-Maryland History*, edited by Michael A. Powell and Bruce A. Thompson (Baltimore: The Press at the Maryland Historical Society, forthcoming).

college training and were inferior teachers unworthy of equal pay. Despite Orem's opposition, every African-American teacher in the County signed a petition in January 1937 requesting the Board of Education to equalize teachers' salaries.²⁸³ Table 2 shows that while Prince George's County paid African American teachers in 1936 slightly better than the state average it still was not equal to what the white teachers were paid.

Table 2. *Average Teachers Salaries in Prince George's County and State of Maryland, 1936*²⁸⁴

Location	Elementary Schools		High Schools	
	White	Colored	White	Colored
Prince George's	\$1,169	\$ 711	\$1,396	\$ 858
Statewide	\$1,202	\$ 636	\$1,469	\$ 817

With the approval of the Colored Teachers' Association of Prince George's County, the NAACP filed a petition for writ of mandamus to equalize the salaries between African-American and white teachers in the county. The plaintiff of record was Evelyn Elsie Cook, a teacher at Chapel Hill colored elementary school.²⁸⁵

Orem resisted every step of the way. Rumors circulated that a compromise (with a 50% raise) was available. In June 1937, Steven Wright, principal of the high school in Upper Marlboro, was dismissed for inefficient record keeping, insubordination, and the fact that one of his teachers was known to stay out late and drink "intoxicating beverages." It should be noted that as president of the Colored Teachers' Association of Prince George's County, Wright had worked with Thurgood Marshall to launch the teacher's salary equalization campaign in the county. After Wright's dismissal, all probationary teachers (less than two years service at current position) were dismissed.²⁸⁶

²⁸³"Nice's Equal Pay to Teachers Plan Coldly Received," *Washington Evening Star*, 30 December 1938, B-1.

²⁸⁴Memorandum Re: Petition to Board of Education of Prince George's County, Maryland to Equalize Teachers' Salaries, 25 January 1938, NAACP Papers, I-D-90.

²⁸⁵Petition for Writ of Mandamus, Evelyn Elsie Cook v. Board of Education of Prince George's County, a body corporate, Nicholas Orem, Superintendent of Education, filed 26 March 1938, NAACP Papers, II-L-41.

²⁸⁶Memorandum Re: Prince George's County Teacher's Salary Situation, 6 June 1938, NAACP Papers, I-D-90; Thurgood Marshall to Walter White and Charles H. Houston, 21 June 1938, NAACP Papers, I-D-90.

While the Prince George's County suit stalled, a similar case (Mills) in Anne Arundel County was heard and won in federal court by the NAACP. Marshall now had a legal ruling that teachers' salaries had to be equal. Orem and the Board of Education's attorney promised to comply with the Anne Arundel County (Mills case) ruling and place all teachers on the same salary scale. In May 1940, however, Orem "pulled a fast one by classifying all Negro teachers (except eleven lickspittles and stooges) as second-class teachers thus denying them salary increases despite the vote of the School Board in February."²⁸⁷ For the time being the *status quo* prevailed.

Connecting with the Federal Government

What did change in Prince George's County in the interwar period was its relationship with the federal government. Transportation improvements had begun the process of linking county citizens to the federal government. As for ATHA, the fourteen-mile stretch from Bladensburg to Laurel became the County's first suburban corridor in the early twentieth century when suburbs formed around the streetcar system, which paralleled the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. In addition, the U.S. Army's presence at the College Park Airport fueled aviation innovations, provided jobs, and pumped money into the local economy. The federal government was beginning to spread into the County through the ATHA corridor.²⁸⁸

In the interwar period, transportation became an increasingly important link between the federal government and the people living within ATHA. By the 1920s, one-quarter of the County's population lived in this corridor, and over 75 percent of these suburbanites worked in Washington, D.C. In the 1930s, as the port of Baltimore became the third-largest in the nation, rail freight capacity grew exponentially and a passenger service between Washington and Baltimore was established.²⁸⁹

The major transportation development, however, was the rise of the automobile. In 1917, there were 55,000 cars registered in the state; by 1945, there were 375,000 with one of the best highway systems in the nation, which had been built using a four-cent gasoline tax. The impact in northern Prince George's County could be felt along U.S. 1, which ran through the heart of ATHA on its way to and from Washington, D.C. U.S. 1 replaced the Old Post Road as the main thoroughfare along the Atlantic seaboard. Though faster, U.S. 1 was much like the Old Post Road in that small towns (e.g., Laurel, Beltsville, College Park, and Hyattsville) greeted the traveler every few miles. An indication of the rising importance of the automobile within ATHA was

²⁸⁷Thurgood Marshall to Roy Wilkins, 22 May 1940, NAACP Papers, I-D-90.

²⁸⁸Virta 193. For more on the history of the College Park Airport, see www.collegeparkaviationmuseum.com.

²⁸⁹Virta 193.

the inclusion of garages with many of the houses built in the 1920s in University Park, and in the mid-1930s at Greenbelt. Population growth and economic development was no longer limited to the short distances around the streetcar lines. The implications of this development would become more visible after WWII, when suburban growth exploded.²⁹⁰

Coupled with transportation enhancements, the Great Depression provided an opportunity for the federal government to strengthen its connection with northern Prince George's County. Although the Great Depression took longer to hit Maryland than some other parts of the nation, its effects were equally devastating once it arrived. Thousands of people became unemployed, banks closed, and companies went bankrupt. The family became the first line of help. Private agencies and then local governments soon got involved. Gov. Ritchie committed the state to helping the unemployed and, despite his states' rights philosophy, was eventually compelled to seek federal government assistance. The federal government's New Deal programs did help people endure the Great Depression, but there was a price. The federal government set the rules for its programs and profoundly affected local communities, including those within ATHA.²⁹¹

The two largest New Deal programs operating in northern Prince George's County were the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Between 1933 and 1943 the WPA employed nearly twenty percent of Maryland's workers. The WPA included a variety of projects, although most people were employed as manual laborers on construction projects such as dormitories on the College Park campus of the University of Maryland. The CCC, however, was probably the most popular New Deal program in Maryland. Eighteen- to twenty-five-year-old males from families on relief joined work camps operated in military style. CCC projects focused on preserving and enhancing natural resources and park lands. Between 1933 and 1942, over 21,000 Marylanders participated in the CCC. Besides the \$22 per month sent to their families, the CCC kept these young men from wandering the countryside and produced local improvements. Both programs would play an important role in bringing the federal government into northern Prince George's County.²⁹²

²⁹⁰Chapelle 225; Fox and Walsh 699.

²⁹¹For a brief overview of the Great Depression in Maryland, see Chapelle, 234-237. For a detailed study of the New Deal in Baltimore, and by extension Maryland, see Jo Ann E. Argensinger, *Toward a New Deal in Baltimore: People and Government in the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988).

²⁹²Chapelle 240-241; Brugger 510-512.



CCC Lodge at BARC

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) started the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in 1910 to conduct research and find solutions to agricultural problems of national importance. In 1935, ARS moved from Arlington Farm, where the Pentagon is currently located, to Beltsville and established the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC). This new 7,000-acre campus would become the flagship of agricultural research in the world; both the horticultural and animal husbandry components have produced numerous innovations, and BARC is also home to the National Agricultural Library.²⁹³

Both CCC and WPA laborers were heavily involved in the construction of BARC in the 1930s. Items built included roads, bridges, parking areas, sidewalks, and buildings. The most visible building constructed by the CCC is the colonial revival-style building on U.S. 1. The most intriguing, however, is the Log Lodge, which currently serves as the National Visitors Center. The Lodge was started in 1934 by the WPA but was stopped when only four logs high. The CCC took over the project and, using only

²⁹³“Selected Highlights & Major Accomplishments,” pamphlet produced by BARC. For an overview of Beltsville’s history, see *A History of Beltsville, 1776-1976* (Beltsville Fire Dept. and Women’s Community Club of Beltsville, 1976); and an excellent summary available at BARC’s website at <www.ba.ars.usda.gov/history/index.html>.

timber from the BARC property, completed it in 1937. The Lodge served as a recreation center for the CCC until 1942. It served as a cafeteria from 1942 to 1985, entertaining thousands of scientists from around the world and many VIP guests, including President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Russian Premier and Mrs. Nikita Khrushchev. So, in addition to providing relief jobs during the Great Depression, BARC became a major employer and tourist attraction within ATHA.²⁹⁴

The planned residential community of Greenbelt was constructed on 3,371 acres of submarginal land provided by the BARC campus. Located twelve miles from Washington, D.C., and one mile from U.S. 1, the main idea behind Greenbelt was to build a model community where workers could live in a park-like setting. Rexford Guy Tugwell had envisioned a series of “greenbelt” communities, and Greenbelt was the first of three (with Greenhills, Ohio, and Greendale, Wisconsin) that were built under the supervision of the Farm Resettlement Administration. The community included a lake, parks, internal walkways and underpasses, a school, swimming pool, recreational center, and a small shopping center with all of the buildings done in an Art Deco style. It was a self-contained community with a futuristic look. The Greenbelt project provided over 13,000 jobs. Each family had to meet an income requirement (\$800 to \$2,200 per year) with only one spouse as wage-earner. All families were white,²⁹⁵ but they were religiously diverse. One-third of the 885 families selected (out of 5,700 applications) to live in the community worked for the federal government. During WWII, the Public Works Administration added one thousand “defense homes.”²⁹⁶

Greenbelt has always been controversial. The “green town” concept, based on the garden towns of the nineteenth century were seen by some as pie-

²⁹⁴Ibid.; “The Log Lodge,” BARC brochure. For more information on BARC, see www.ba.ars.usda.gov.

²⁹⁵Greenbelt’s original plan did include a development to be built for African-American families, called the Rossville Rural development. It would have occupied almost one-third of the Greenbelt tract. The plan was soon scrapped and officials cited the new town of Langston Terrace in northeast Washington, which provided low-cost housing for African Americans, built by the Public Works Administration. Several Black families lived farms on federal land surrounding the town. Cathy D. Knepper, *Greenbelt, Maryland: A Living Legacy of the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 32.

²⁹⁶“Greenbelt Historic District,” National Historic Landmarks Nomination Form,” Maryland Historic Trust, Crownsville, Maryland. Information from Greenbelt’s Museum can be found at www.ci.greenbelt.md.us. The Greenbelt Branch of the Prince George’s County Public Library System has the Rex Tugwell Collection (Planned Communities). Available studies of Greenbelt include: Joseph Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs: A History of the Greenbelt Town Program, 1935-1954* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971); Howard S. Berger, *Greenbelt Historic District Study* (Upper Marlboro, MD: Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1994); *Greenbelt: The History of a New Town, 1937-1987* (Greenbelt: City of Greenbelt, 1987); Leslie Gene Hunter, “Greenbelt, Maryland: A City on a Hill,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 63 (1968): 105-136; Cathy D. Knepper, *Greenbelt, Maryland: A Living Legacy of the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

in-the-sky utopias. Greenbelt went a step further and became chartered in 1937 as the first town in Maryland to use a council-manager form of government. Even more troublesome was the fact that the federal government built and operated the community until 1953 when it was sold to a cooperative of the families living within Greenbelt, which continues to this day to run the community. To some, this federal government involvement smacked of socialism. One critic said that the green towns were a “sinister plot to impose foreign, socialist, or communist ways of life on the American people or at least they forced unwanted regimentation by being planned.” Nothing quite so dire resulted, and the success of Greenbelt did inspire some later planned communities, including Columbia, Maryland, and Reston, Virginia.²⁹⁷

With the construction of BARC and Greenbelt, the overall impact of the federal government in the ATHA corridor during the Great Depression was rather significant. BARC became the leading agricultural research facility in the world, and Greenbelt served as a model of community planning throughout the nation in the twentieth century. In local terms, this meant that the federal government had extended out of Washington and into Prince George's County. Its physical presence would eventually transform transportation and housing patterns within the County. The federal government had come to stay, and it left its imprint.

World War II created even more job opportunities, and many of those new workers would reside within the ATHA corridor. Otherwise, the war's impact on northern Prince George's County was tangential. The direct impact on the manufacturing sector was limited to the Engineering and Research Corporation (ERCO) located outside of Riverdale. Before the war ERCO built Ercoupe airplanes. At its peak during the war, ERCO employed 3,800 people to produce war materiel.²⁹⁸ Many citizens worked in D.C. for the federal government bureaucracy and participated in the war effort through rationing, USO dances, Red Cross bandage campaigns, scrap metal drives, and war bonds. A more sordid economic reality for Prince George's County before, during, and after the war, was its reputation “as the gambling and girly club mecca of booming Washington.” Jimmy La Fontaine operated the most infamous gambling house at the corner of Eastern Avenue and Bladensburg Road, just over the District of Columbia border.²⁹⁹

Two nearby military installations also had an impact on northern Prince George's County. Fort George G. Meade, located in Anne Arundel County near the B&O Railroad, was built in WWI as a training center and had over 100,000 men go through its facility. Fort Meade had the same function

²⁹⁷“Greenbelt Historic District,” Nomination Form; the quotation can be found on Continuation Sheet, Item Number 7, Page 6.

²⁹⁸Callcott, *Maryland and America*, 29-58; Virta 230.

²⁹⁹The quotation is from Callcott, *Maryland and America*, 50. See also Virta 221; Denny 141.

during World War II, processing and training thousands of recruits. At one time over 70,000 men were at Fort Meade. Soldiers from Fort Meade could be found in Annapolis, Baltimore, or Washington on any weekend, but Laurel, the closest town to the base, also benefited from the influx of soldiers. In addition, Fort Meade was one of several POW (prisoner of war) camps in Maryland. The POWs worked as laborers on farms and were noted for saving the tomato crop of 1943. Today, Fort Meade continues to operate as a military base, and is home to the National Security Administration and to the National Cryptologic Museum.³⁰⁰

Andrews Air Force Base, located five miles south of the District of Columbia in Camp Springs, Maryland, was developed in 1942 to provide air service to the nation's capital. At its wartime peak, Andrews employed 2,600 people. The base occupies over 4,000 acres and has steadily grown, and today it is home to the Eighty-ninth Military Airlift Wing, which transports the President (via Air Force One) and other high-ranking government officials around the world. This was certainly a case of "if you build it they will come." Camp Springs was a Methodist camp meeting site that was not accessible by rail or trolley. The air base created the need for better roads which subsequently encouraged suburbanization into that section of Prince George's County.³⁰¹

The legacy of the interwar and World War II period would be the full-scale arrival of the federal government. Andrews Air Force Base, BARC, and Greenbelt in northern Prince George's County were harbingers of things to come. The federal government's presence in the post-1945 period would help transform the region into a major metropolitan area.

³⁰⁰Virta 229; Chapelle 200.

³⁰¹Callcott, *Maryland and America*, 43-44; Virta 233.

CHAPTER SIX

ATHA, 1945 TO THE PRESENT: METAMORPHOSIS

Bruce A. Thompson

After World War II, Prince George's County would experience a population explosion that had started in the 1930s in the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA) corridor, a fourteen mile stretch located between the Washington, D.C., and Laurel. The effects of this population boom would be felt within ATHA and throughout the rest of the county. As historian Alan Virta has observed the population growth had two distinct phases. In phase one, which Virta dates 1930-1970, Prince George's County became a model bedroom community for white middle-class residents who worked in the District. In phase two, 1970-2000, diversification (economically and demographically) led to significant changes that completed the metamorphosis of Prince George's and ATHA. The County went from being rural and agriculturally based to "a dynamic metropolitan area."³⁰² ATHA continued to spearhead many of the changes that took place within the County. ATHA led the way in suburban development and population growth, emerged as a major research center, and participated in the economic, social, and political changes that have taken place in Prince George's since 1945.

One great change for the better came in the 1950s with the completion of the Anacostia River Flood Control and Navigation Project. The town of Bladensburg, and also North Brentwood and Edmonston, had suffered disastrous flooding due to storms over the years, and some relief was essential. The major works were constructed under the supervision of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The river was dredged, the stream path widened, and earthen dikes were constructed along the edges of the widened paths. The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission served as the lead agency at the local level, and became the maintenance operator of the massive flood control works once they were in place. The State Roads Commission (now the State

³⁰²The phrase is from Alan Virta, "A County with Rich History: Prince George's County History," www.inform.umd.edu/UMS+State/MD_Resources/counties/PG/PG300/. See Alan Virta, *Prince George's County: A Pictorial History* (Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company, 1998), 212, for a description of the suburbanization phases in Prince George's County.

Highway Administration) took care of road relocations and bridge construction within the project area. As part of the project, a new marina and recreational boat basin was established south of the Peace Cross. The marina, at first plagued with siltation problems, is now fully functional and is maintained by the M-NCPPC as the Historic Bladensburg Waterfront Park.³⁰³

Demographic Change

Before 1945, most American cities resembled cities in Europe and in the rest of the world. The population was concentrated within the city and its very close suburbs. Almost everyone used some sort of public transportation – whether in the form of street cars, taxis, autobuses, or short line trains – for their daily travel. Trains connected major and minor cities and were by far the most commonly used method of intercity transport. Rural areas surrounding these cities engaged in truck farming to feed the ever growing industrial powerhouses in their midst.

In the United States, the post-war period changed all of that. While Europe and the rest of the world struggled to rebuild itself to pre-war levels, accumulated wealth and pent-up demand from the wartime economy in a country physically untouched by the ravages of war propelled the United States on an economic and social trajectory unknown in the history of mankind. Suburban living became the norm for all, not the preserve of the wealthy. To get to and from these suburbs, everyone needed an automobile. The earlier infrastructure of trains, street cars, and the like could not expand rapidly enough to meet the demands of the new reality. Indeed, they became viewed as obstacles to good automobile traffic flow in cities. In the name of military defense, new intercity highways were constructed, which allowed the suburbs to expand even further away from the cities. Moreover, modern air transport quickly doomed most passenger train travel. The face of post-World War II America changed rapidly as population and economic growth followed the new transportation corridors. Prince George's County, and ATHA in particular, could stand as models for the changes that took place on a larger scale in America.³⁰⁴

Population growth would be the catalyst for much of the change that took place within Prince George's County and ATHA after World War II. This population growth can be attributed to a broader pattern of suburban growth that was taking place in the region. Table 1 illustrates that suburban growth in Maryland took place around the two major cities of Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

³⁰³ *History of the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission*, WSSC, 1988; *WSSC 75th Anniversary History*, 1993.

³⁰⁴ For a fuller discussion of suburban growth in post-WWII America, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

Table 1. *Suburb Growth in Maryland Around Baltimore and Washington, D.C., 1930-2000*³⁰⁵

	<i>Balt. City</i>	<i>Balt. Co.</i>	<i>Wash. D.C.</i>	<i>Mont. Co.</i>	<i>P.G. Co.</i>
1930	804,874	124,565	486,869	49,206	60,095
1940	859,100	155,825	663,091	83,912	89,490
1950	949,708	270,273	802,178	164,401	194,182
1960	939,024	492,428	763,956	340,928	357,395
1970	905,759	621,077	756,510	522,809	660,567
1980	786,775	655,615	638,333	579,053	665,071
1990	736,014	692,134	609,900	757,027	729,268
2000	651,154	754,292	572,059	873,341	801,515

The population actually began growing earlier in the century. Between 1900 and 1930, the County's population doubled in large part due to the rise of suburban communities along the streetcar line and U.S. 1 through the heart of ATHA.³⁰⁶ Governor Austin Crothers completed U.S. 1 to Washington, D.C., as part of a "good roads movement," which made the Maryland the first state to commit to building a system of highways. U.S. 1 had been a state road (for horse and buggy) for quite some time and a trail before that, and this paved modern road for automobiles would prove to be central to ATHA's

³⁰⁵Maryland Office of Planning, "Population of Maryland's Regions and Jurisdictions, 1790-1990, www.mdp.state.md.us/msdc/census/histcens.xls; U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1930-1980, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD; U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990 and 2000, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

³⁰⁶See Susan G. Pearl, "Three Hundred Years of County History," Prince George's County Tricentennial, www.inform.umd.edu/UMS+State/MD_Resources/counties/PG/PG300/threhund.html.

development.³⁰⁷

The arrival of the federal government in the 1930s encouraged more people into the area. The establishment of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) and Greenbelt had created thousands of jobs and homes for people. U.S. 1 connected these sites and the rest of the ATHA to the District, thereby making it a logical corridor of growth. As Table 2 shows, Prince George's population grew at an incredibly rapid pace from 1930 to 1970. Population growth almost came to a halt in the 1970s with modest increases in the 1980s and 1990s.

Table 2. *Population Growth in Maryland, Prince George's County, and ATHA, 1930-2000*³⁰⁸

	<i>Maryland</i>	<i>Prince George's County Population</i>	<i>ATHA</i>	<i>Percent of ATHA to County Population</i>
1930	1,631,526	60,095	28,445	47.3
1940	1,821,244	89,490	44,432	49.7
1950	2,343,001	194,182	-----	----
1960	3,100,689	357,395	181,946	50.9
1970	3,922,399	660,567	269,194	40.8
1980	4,216,975	665,071	251,045	37.7
1990	4,781,468	729,268	272,868	37.4

³⁰⁷Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland: A Middle Temperament, 1634-1980* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 430.

³⁰⁸Maryland Office of Planning, "Population of Maryland's Regions and Jurisdictions, 1790-1990, www.mdp.state.md.us/msdc/census/histcens.xls; U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1930-1980, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD; U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990 and 2000, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>. The figures for ATHA were computed by adding together the population totals for the following districts: #1 Vansville, #2 Bladensburg, #10 Laurel, #16 Hyattsville, #17 Chillum, #19 Riverdale, and #21 Berwyn. The data for the 1950 census was not collected in a compatible format.

2000	5,296,486	801,515	285,175	35.6
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Within Prince George's County, ATHA served as a major focal point for much of the suburban growth through 1960. New transportation routes such as the Baltimore-Washington Parkway (1954) and Kenilworth Avenue (1957), both running parallel south of U.S. 1, provided greater access to ATHA by facilitating the flow of automobile traffic in and out of D.C. The other major growth area in the county was around Andrews Air Force Base on the south side of D.C. along Routes 4 and 5. After 1960, suburban growth spread throughout the county, where land was available along other transportation routes (e.g., U.S. 50, Capital Beltway, and the Metro). Interstate 95 (1963), running parallel on the north side of U.S. 1, and the Capital Beltway (1964) took much of the truck and commercial traffic off of U.S. 1. In addition, these interstates spurred the development of trucking companies and warehouses and encouraged more suburbanization further away from the urban centers of Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. Nevertheless, ATHA continued to be an important area within the county. U.S. 1 remained a vital route, and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, active since 1835, continued to serve a variety of businesses along its tracks. The passenger service offered by Amtrak, and the Green Line (mid-1990s) on the Metro have strengthened ATHA's connection with D.C. (and Baltimore). While no longer claiming nearly half of the County's population as ATHA did from 1930 through 1960, this fourteen-mile corridor was still home to 35 percent of the County's population in 2000.

Besides growing, the population in Prince George's and ATHA underwent substantial change. Prior to 1970, the people moving into the County were predominantly white and working class. According to historian Alan Virta, this occurred in large part because of the residential pattern that already existed in Washington, D.C. The affluent neighborhoods were in the northern part of the city and extended into Montgomery County. Middle and working-class neighborhoods were located in the eastern part of D.C. So, ATHA was a natural extension of these neighborhoods. In addition, there were small black neighborhoods like North Brentwood, Lakeland, and Rossville sprinkled throughout ATHA. Segregation was the norm throughout the County. Census data for ATHA in 1970 (see Table 3) shows a racial profile that is heavily white (93.9 percent). African Americans comprised 4.8 percent of the population, with other heritages making up 1.2 percent.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁹Virta, *Prince George's County*, 212-213.

Table 3. *Demographic Profile by Race of ATHA , 1970*³¹⁰

<i>District</i>	<i>Total Pop.</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Other</i>
#1 Vansville	20,914	20,072	629	213
#2 Bladensburg	41,885	40,436	1,022	427
#10 Laurel	31,579	29,995	1,379	205
#16 Hyattsville	15,491	15,051	303	137
#17 Chillum	75,728	66,176	8,099	1,453
#19 Riverdale	21,909	21,352	356	201
#21 Berwyn	61,688	59,782	1,242	664
TOTALS	269,194	252,864	13,030	3,300

Prince George's racial composition changed dramatically after 1970. Fair housing laws in the 1970s and the availability of inexpensive property enticed large numbers of middle-class blacks to settle in the County.³¹¹ By

³¹⁰U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1930-1980, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

³¹¹Greenbelt was notably slow to welcome African-American residents. The first African Americans to live in Greenbelt came in the 1960s, and by 1970, 230 African Americans lived in Greenbelt, primarily in the community of Springhill Lake (Knepper, *Greenbelt, Maryland*, 172-3). Although research hasn't yet been done to document the facts on this issue, residents today recall that there were never significant numbers of African Americans in living in historic Greenbelt until the mid-1980s and 1990s. Although fair housing laws were in effect, there was little enforcement, and sales agents were discouraging to blacks. I thank Katie Scott-Childress and Jill Parsons-St. John of the Greenbelt Museum for sharing this information.

2000, Prince George's had become the second largest county in Maryland and home to one-third of the state's African-American population, the largest concentration in the state, including Baltimore City. Similarly, the immigrant population in Prince George's jumped markedly in the 1990s, constituting 12 percent of the total population and consisting mainly of people with Hispanic backgrounds. Thus, the suburban face of Prince George's County today is multinational and racially diverse.³¹²

The process of demographic diversification within ATHA, however, took a little longer than the rest of the County. As Tables 4 and 5 show, ATHA still had a white majority (55.3 percent) in 1990, although the number of whites in the area was clearly falling. The African-American population has risen to 34.6 percent, and there were notable Asian and Hispanic populations. Comparing the census data of 1970 with 1990 the districts of Chillum and Bladensburg, on the southern side of ATHA, experienced the strongest demographic shifts.

Table 4. *Demographic Profile by Race of ATHA, 1980*

District	Total Pop.	White	Black	Other
#1 Vansville	19,597	16,527	1,914	1,156
#2 Bladensburg	36,426	22,089	12,040	2,297
#10 Laurel	38,638	32,721	4,594	1,323
#16 Hyattsville	13,634	11,564	1,578	492
#17 Chillum	69,807	35,158	29,043	5,606
#19 Riverdale	15,788	12,372	2,815	601
#21 Berwyn	60,155	52,552	5,189	2,414

³¹²Virta, *Prince George's County*, 212; U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>; Martin Ford, "Alien Nation? Immigration Here and There, Then and Now," *Maryland Humanities* (September 2002): 2-8.

Table 5. *Demographic Profile by Race of ATHA , 1990*³¹³

<i>District</i>	<i>Total Pop.</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Native Amer.</i>	<i>Asian or Pacific Is.</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Hispanic (any race)</i>
#1 Vansville	21,843	15,648	4,034	67	1,766	328	895
#2 Bladensburg	36,918	14,336	20,288	115	1,028	1,151	2,076
#10 Laurel	48,231	36,342	8,858	116	2,381	534	1,559
#16 Hyattsville	13,292	8,745	3,571	49	452	475	944
#17 Chillum	74,817	21,227	41,513	264	4,313	7,500	12,343
#19 Riverdale	17,243	9,780	6,154	94	651	614	1,390
#21 Berwyn	60,524	44,886	9,946	140	4,848	704	2,189
TOTALS	272,868	150,964	94,364	795	15,439	11,306	21,396

By 2000 (see Table 6), all of ATHA's districts were in flux. Moreover, African Americans were now the majority race (43.9 percent; 62.7 percent countywide), with the white population in decline (37.9 percent) and the Hispanic population on the rise. White flight, usually associated with the 1950s, had come to ATHA in the 1980s and 1990s. Professional and middle-class African Americans continued moving into the area, and the Chillum

³¹³U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

district became home to a growing Hispanic community. In short, ATHA had grown more populous and diverse (see Table 7).

Table 6. *Demographic Profile by Race of ATHA , 2000*³¹⁴

<i>District</i>	<i>Total Pop.</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Nat. Amer</i>	<i>Asian or Pacific Is.</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Hispanic (any race)</i>
#1 Vansville	23,471	11,189	7,869	79	2,546	1,788	2,056
#2 Bladensburg	40,089	8,766	26,316	133	1,041	3,833	4,967
#10 Laurel	50,892	24,194	20,838	146	3,022	2,692	2,690
#16 Hyattsville	13,865	5,872	5,458	76	521	1,938	2,303
#17 Chillum	75,245	17,685	38,352	391	2,994	15,823	24,411
#19 Riverdale	18,580	7,381	7,550	95	845	2,709	4,406
#21 Berwyn	63,033	32,950	18,922	184	6,842	4,135	4,357
TOTALS	285,175	108,037	125,305	1,104	17,811	32,918	45,190

Table 7. *Demographic Profile of ATHA, 1970-2000 (percent of population)*

	<i>White</i>	<i>African-</i>	<i>Other</i>
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³¹⁴U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

		<i>American</i>	
1970	94%	5%	1%
1990	55%	35%	18%
2000	38%	44%	34%

ATHA Emerges as a Major Research Center

The second striking feature of ATHA in the post-1945 period is its emergence as a major research center. ATHA had already been the site of some research – namely the U.S. Army experiments with the Wright Brothers in the early part of the century and the development of Greenbelt in the 1930s as a living laboratory for community planning. Both the State of Maryland and the federal government built upon this foundation to create a synergy for research.

Judith Resnik epitomized the spirit of innovation that characterizes the researchers who work within the ATHA corridor. Resnik graduated in 1977 from the University of Maryland with a doctorate in electrical engineering. The next year she joined the astronaut program and began her training. She became the second woman in space in 1984 on board the space shuttle Discovery, and she died two years later aboard the tragic Challenger flight. Shortly before those flights, at a dedication of the Adele Stamp Student Union, Resnik declared, “We must continue forward with our endeavors and firsts, and broaden our horizons at every opportunity.”³¹⁵

Charles Benedict Calvert would have agreed with Resnik. He provided 428 acres from his Riversdale plantation to establish the Maryland Agricultural College which opened in 1859. The goal was to pursue and teach agricultural excellence. The College’s mission expanded in 1920 with the merger of the Maryland Agricultural College in College Park and the University of Maryland professional schools in Baltimore. The new university awarded Ph.D.s and grew steadily. After World War II, enrollment jumped to 9,792 students because of the G.I. Bill. Academic standards tightened and McKeldin Library was built in the 1950s and 1960s, resulting in the establishment of honor societies such as Phi Beta Kappa. Enrollment peaked in 1985 in excess of 38,000.³¹⁶

³¹⁵Dianna Burch, “Judith A. Resnik,” www.alumni.umd.edu/VirtualAlumniCenter/HallFame/Resnik.html.

³¹⁶“University of Maryland Timeline,” www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/

Higher education in Maryland was reorganized in 1988. The five University of Maryland campuses combined with six other schools to form the University of Maryland System. The University of Maryland at College Park (UMCP) became the flagship of the university system. Its state-mandated mission is to serve “as the State’s primary center of research and graduate education and the institutional choice for undergraduate students of exceptional ability and promise.” Thus, UMCP fosters “innovative instruction” and research that “creates and applies knowledge.” By 2002, UMCP’s sponsored research reached \$352 million and the school was one of seven facilities designated as a NASA Research, Engineering and Technology Institute. Like Resnik, UMCP students and faculty are committed to broadening horizons.³¹⁷

Discovering the unknown goes beyond the UMCP campus. Located just a couple of miles up U.S. 1 is the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC). It started in 1910 when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) purchased the 475-acre Walnut Grange plantation in Beltsville. The plantation had belonged originally to Thomas Snowden and was a gift to his daughter, Mary, when she married John Herbert of Walnut Grange, Virginia. The house on the property dates to the 1790s. In 1911, the USDA placed dairy cows in Beltsville and set up its animal husbandry research program. Sewell Wright, one of the early pioneers in population genetics, joined the BARC staff in 1915 and six years later he wrote *Systems of Mating*, a standard work on plant and animal breeding. The innovative research and discoveries by BARC scientists had only just begun.³¹⁸

Henry A. Wallace, Secretary of Agriculture (1932-1940), demonstrated his commitment to agricultural research when he expanded BARC in the 1930s. Research stations located in Arlington, Virginia, Bethesda, Maryland, and on the Mall in Washington, D.C., were moved to Beltsville. The Bankhead and Jones Act in 1935 authorized the USDA to engage in a wide range of basic agricultural research. By 1962, BARC was home to 25 percent of the USDA’s research scientists, and the National Agricultural Library was completed in 1967. Today, BARC is the world leader in agricultural research.³¹⁹

The list of discoveries that has come out of BARC is indeed impressive. A few examples are:

InstAdv/nowandthen/timeline. For a fuller overview of the University’s history, see George Callcott, *A History of the University of Maryland* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1966).

³¹⁷“University of Maryland Mission Statement,” www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/provost/Strategic_Planning/Mission2000.html and “Fact Card,” www.urhome.umd.edu/factcard.

³¹⁸“Celebrating 90 Years: History of Beltsville Agricultural Research Center,” www.ba.ars.usda.gov/history.

³¹⁹Ibid.; J. Kim Kaplan, “Beltsville Agricultural Research Center,” *2001 Research Highlights: Beltsville Area* (Beltsville, MD: USDA, 2002), 48.

Beltsville small white turkey
DEET, a strong insect repellent
2,4-D, a common herbicide
New life forms such as viroid and spiroplasmas; photoperiodism in plants
Roma tomatoes
New Guinea impatiens
Developed the Food Guide Pyramid

BARC has also spawned entire new federal government agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, Biological Survey of the Department of Interior, Forest Service, and the Soil Conservation Service. BARC has even helped other federal programs set up their research programs. For example, in 1940 BARC transferred 2,238 acres to the Department of Interior to establish the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. Later, BARC also donated land to the National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA) to build the Goddard Space Flight Center. Thus, the research establishment within ATHA continued spreading.³²⁰

NASA started in 1958 and arrived in Greenbelt a year later with the Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC), NASA's lead science center. Specifically, GSFC (commonly called "Goddard") "is a major U.S. laboratory for developing and operating unmanned scientific spacecraft." This facility was named for Robert Hutchings Goddard, who was America's rocket pioneer. In the 1920s, Goddard was the first scientist to successfully launch a rocket using liquid fuel. In a report to the Smithsonian he optimistically suggested that man could someday go to the moon.

GSFC's vision and mission (see textbox) push America into the final frontier on a voyage of discovery. To this end, Goddard's activities are multifaceted. Every piece of equipment that goes into space is tested at the Goddard facility. Moreover, Goddard has overseen much of the Hubble Space Telescope (HST) project. Part of the project included refurbishment, and in 1993, Goddard oversaw the mission. It required eleven days in space with astronauts walking in space on five of those days to complete the repairs. Throughout the 1990s, Goddard served as Hubble's control center, retrieving data for scientists and generating all commands to the telescope.³²¹

³²⁰Kaplan 46-51.

³²¹Goddard's vision and mission statements can be found at www.gsfc.nasa.gov/indepth/gsfaplan.pdf. Information about Goddard's activities can be found at Darlene A. Ahalt, "About Goddard," www.gsfc.nasa.gov/indepth/about_facilities.html.

Goddard Space Flight Center

Vision

“We revolutionize knowledge of the Earth and the universe through scientific discovery from space to enhance life on Earth.”

Mission

“Goddard Space Flight Center enables discovery through leadership in Earth and space science.

We serve the scientific community, inspire the Nation, foster education, and stimulate economic growth.

We partner with others to achieve NASA’s goals.

We create technologies that support and advance these endeavors to take full advantage of doing research in space.

We accomplish this through innovation in all that we do.”

While Hubble is used to explore the universe, some of Goddard’s work focuses on the Earth. Goddard heads NASA’s Earth Science Enterprise (ESE), which uses orbiting satellites to collect data on the global environment.

Goddard also oversees the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite (GOES), a sophisticated weather satellite system developed in conjunction with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Launched in May 2000, GOES collects weather data on the Western Hemisphere that is used in forecasting. At present, Goddard employs 3,310 civil servants and another 5,983 contract personnel. In addition, Goddard paid out over \$1 billion in FY 2000 to contractors. Clearly, Goddard’s research program generates considerable impact on Northern Prince George’s County.³²²

In contrast, the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (PWRC) is firmly grounded on terra firma. Established in 1936, PWRC became “the nation’s first wildlife research station.” The 12,750 acre site, originally called the Patuxent Research Refuge, is adjacent to BARC and extends toward Laurel. In the late 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Public Works Administration (PWA) constructed the first three buildings, and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) dug out Cash Lake, which was flooded in 1939 and stocked with fish. Besides creating a refuge, the Center employs thirty-two scientists and ninety-five support staff who participate in a variety of research programs, including:

environmental contaminants

³²² Ahalt, “About Goddard.”

migratory birds
endangered species captive propagation (e.g., bald eagle and whooping crane)
wetland management

The Center's most famous research linked DDT with thinning egg shells of predatory birds like the bald eagle. Congressional hearings on pesticides led to a nationwide ban on DDT in 1972. Many of the Center's findings are published in the *Wildlife Review* and can be found in the National Wildlife Visitor Center, which opened in 1994.³²³

The most recent research component added to ATHA has been National Archives II. The facility opened in College Park in 1994. It holds most of the federal government records generated since 1945, including the Nixon Presidential materials and the John F. Kennedy Assassination records collection. Scholars from all over the world come to Archives II to do their research on America in the late twentieth century.³²⁴

Thus, it is clear that ATHA was, and is, more than just a bedroom community. Research has become a major part of the area's identity and livelihood. With its proximity to the federal government in Washington, D.C., current nucleus of facilities and trained personnel, the on-going need for research, and the discovery of dinosaur fossils, ATHA is sure to remain a major research center for years to come.

A New Political Climate

Population growth, along with the development of a research industry, meant that economic, social, and political changes would follow, which have made Prince George's the second largest political jurisdiction in the State and the largest African-American and African-American led jurisdiction in the region. Diversification and black political empowerment undergirded the changes that have made the County and ATHA a major player within the state.

Under Lansdale G. Sasscer's leadership from the 1930s to 1964, Prince George's County had a genteel, Southern style of politics. Face-to-face meetings, handshakes, and the occasional bribe (e.g., conviction of former County Commissioner Jesse S. Baggett for selling favors to a contractor) with the County Commissioners sealed deals and facilitated the County's rapid growth. The County's delegation to Annapolis operated in a similar manner (perhaps minus the corruption) in the 1960s and 1970s. Under the leadership of attorney Peter O'Malley, the elected officials were a tight-knit and powerful group. The incumbents usually ate breakfast together once a week, discussed issues, and voted as a unified (largely Democratic) bloc. This alliance

³²³See www.pwrc.usgs.gov/welcom3.htm.

³²⁴See www.archives.gov/ for more information on the operation and holdings of Archives II.

disintegrated in the late 1970s and politicians became independent players. The politics of old were giving way to the demands of the middle-class suburbanites who settled in ATHA and then elsewhere in the County.³²⁵

The effects of this power shift to middle-class suburbanites were numerous. First, the citizens voted for a home-rule charter, which sought to replace “insider” politics with a reformed, bureaucratic government open to all. Thus, an elected county executive and county council took over political control in 1970. Prince George’s county executives have been:

William W. Gullett (1970-1974)
Winfield M. Kelly, Jr. (1974-1978)
Lawrence J. Hogan (1978-1982)
Parris N. Glendening (1982-1994)
Wayne K. Curry (1994-2002)

ATHA has been well represented in the county and state leadership. Gullett was a former mayor of College Park, Hogan taught at the University of Maryland from 1960 to 1968, and Curry grew up in Cheverly, just outside the ATHA boundary. Glendening was a political science professor at the University of Maryland who began his political career as a member of the Hyattsville City Council. Glendening subsequently served on the Prince George’s County Council, 1974-1982 (chair, 1979-1981) and became Prince George’s only three-term County Executive. He used his political base in Prince George’s County, the second most populous county in the state, to become a two-term governor. His major initiatives include the HOPE Scholarship Program, the Maryland Gun Violence Act of 1996, and Smart Growth, which focuses on supporting and revitalizing established communities instead of promoting new development, which requires additional infrastructure and reduces farm land and green space. Governor Glendening has also steadfastly opposed casino gambling and the tobacco lobby. ATHA has had a strong voice in shaping both county and state policies.³²⁶

Second, middle-class suburbanites shifted the focus of the County’s economic development. Tobacco farming had been the mainstay of the economy in Prince George’s County for centuries. Even in the twentieth century, farmers continued to rely on tobacco as their cash crop, while at the same time growing other crops. The growth of the federal government, both in the District of County and within Prince George’s, offered an increasing

³²⁵George H. Callcott, *Maryland & America: 1940-1980* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) 26, 65; Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland: A Middle Temperament, 1634-1980* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 647.

³²⁶Virta, *Prince George’s County*, 213; www.mdarchives.state.md.us/msa.mdmanual/;
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/>.

number of employment opportunities. Also important were the contractors and other service providers to the federal government. In addition, the housing boom associated with the population increase fed the economy between 1935 and 1970. Home construction and consumer services (e.g., retail stores, banks, supermarkets, and shopping centers like Prince George's Plaza in 1958) to support the growing communities served as the economic catalyst in this period. When it was completed in 1964, the Capital Beltway marked the dividing line between suburban and rural Prince George's County. This held true within the ATHA corridor, which contained suburban communities to the Beltway and the BARC/Goddard/Patuxent Wildlife Research Center complexes that began at the outer rim of the beltway, with Beltsville and Laurel beyond them.³²⁷

After 1970, political leaders actively sought to diversify the County's economic base. ATHA provided a model with its emergence as a research center. Another focus, both inside and outside of ATHA, has been to link the development of historical preservation sites and cultural arts centers to redevelopment zones. In 1998, over 1.2 million tourists visited Prince George's County, with many of them visiting historic and cultural sites within ATHA. Major tourist attractions included NASA Goddard Visitor Center, College Park Aviation Museum, National Wildlife Visitor Center, Montpelier Mansion and its Cultural Arts Center, and Riversdale. Other significant sites include Abraham Hall, Adelphi Mill, National Visitor Center at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Bladensburg Historic Waterfront Park, Greenbelt Museum and historic Greenbelt, Laurel Museum, National Archives II, and Prince George's Publick Playhouse. In addition, thousands of students and their parents annually visit the University of Maryland campus in College Park, the alma mater of Jim Henson, creator of the Muppets. Finally, trails along tributaries of the Anacostia River, Greenbelt Lake, and Lake Artemesia provide scenic escapes from the hustle and bustle of the world. With other preservation efforts in the works, heritage tourism will continue to be a vital part of the economy within ATHA and the County.³²⁸

Citing inexpensive land and easy access, the County's leaders have also been successful in attracting industry and commerce. Skyscrapers became commonplace around the Metro stations and major Beltway interchanges, and offices parks flourished elsewhere in the County. Two visible landmarks in the County, just south of ATHA, that have helped to change the skyline are the Capital Center and Fed-Ex Field, home of the Washington Redskins. Even more notable, however, are the national and

³²⁷Virta, "A County With a Rich History;" Virta, *Prince George's County*, 212-213; Callcott 66.

³²⁸The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, John Milner Associates, and Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, Inc., *Approved Anacostia Trails Heritage Area Management Plan* (Upper Marlboro, MD: Prince George's County Planning Department, 2001), 1-7.

international firms that have moved to Prince George's. By the early 1980s more residents worked within the county than in Washington, D.C. Today, "high-tech, marketing, and research and development firms" have risen upon the former tobacco fields and create a strong economic base for ATHA and the rest of Prince's George's County.³²⁹

The third effect of the rise of the middle-class suburbanites was the shift of Prince George's County from being traditionally conservative on political issues to being moderate, with growing pockets of liberalism, especially within ATHA (e.g., Greenbelt).³³⁰ A variety of issues (e.g., Vietnam protests at the University of Maryland in 1970, educational reform in the 1980s, and drug-related crime and police brutality in the 1990s) would test the political tenor of Prince George's leadership. The real litmus test, however, was black civil rights.

Brown v. Board of Education (1954) overturned the separate-but-equal doctrine that had been the legal basis of segregation throughout America. In 1959, Prince George's restaurants began to desegregate but sit-ins and other protests were common along U.S. 1 in the 1960s. One of the more infamous segregated restaurants was the Little Tavern, a hamburger joint on U.S. 1 near the University of Maryland campus. The State's Open Accommodations law in 1964 signaled a new racial policy of equal opportunity. Implementing that vision would be a tense and sometimes uncomfortable process.³³¹

Housing and busing emerged as lightning rod issues regarding civil rights. The migration into ATHA prior to 1970 was predominately white. Many of the suburban communities had covenants and real estate agents steered black home buyers to segregated neighborhoods. Prince George's Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) picketed William J. Levitt's housing developments in the county for being white-only. It was not, however, until fair housing laws were passed in the 1970s that black migration began in earnest. The growth started in traditionally black neighborhoods and spread over the next two decades into traditional white neighborhoods (see Tables 3-6 for this process in ATHA). This black population growth ultimately broke down racial housing barriers within ATHA and the rest of the county.³³²

Far more controversial was the issue of school busing. Officially, the

³²⁹Virta, *Prince George's County*, 213, 249. The quotation is from p. 213.

³³⁰The definitions of conservatism and liberalism being used revolve around the level of government responsibility for, and intervention on behalf of, the people's welfare. Populists, progressives, New Dealers, and supporters of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society would have recognized this concept, particularly as it related to role of the federal government and its involvement in the economy, regulating behavior (e.g., drunk driving, abortion), and social issues like civil rights and the environment. However, in the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, both conservatives and liberals, despite the rhetoric, assume that government at all levels will be active in people's lives; they just have different agendas.

³³¹Callcott, *Maryland & America*, 154-157.

³³²Virta, *Prince George's County*, 240; Callcott, *Maryland & America*, 157.

school system in Prince George's County had desegregated in 1965. The reality, however, was that the neighborhood schools reflected the segregated nature of the neighborhoods. Moreover, despite the pockets of liberalism within ATHA, there was support for segregation and its way of life. One of the best examples comes from the Democratic presidential primary of 1972. George C. Wallace, the governor of Alabama, brought his "Send Them a Message" campaign to Maryland. Wallace – a vocal segregationist who drew national attention for standing in front of the University of Alabama and declaring, "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" – criticized the federal government for interfering with people's lives, including court mandated busing. Wallace's final campaign swing through Maryland on May 15, the eve of the primary, included stops at Capital Plaza and Laurel Shopping Center. Wallace's message resonated with white, middle-class suburbanites, and over one thousand people turned out at Laurel to hear him. At the end of the rally, Arthur Bremer from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, shot and permanently crippled Wallace physically and politically. Despite winning both the Michigan and Maryland primaries the next day, Wallace's presidential aspirations were over. Yet, it is clear that Wallace's "politics of rage," as historian Dan Carter called it, had broad support in ATHA.³³³

Part of the reason for Wallace's support stemmed from the fact that federal judge Frank A. Kaufman had already ordered school busing for Prince George's County. On January 29, 1973, 30 percent of the County's 33,000 plus students were bused to schools out of their neighborhoods. The law suit brought by the Prince George's branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and encouraged by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), argued that *de facto* residential segregation resulted in segregated neighborhood schools. Test scores for schools in white neighborhoods were superior to schools in black neighborhoods; therefore, black children were receiving an inferior education. Both black parents and white parents had reservations about this new arrangement, but the busing was carried out without incident.³³⁴

The results of busing were dismal. First, busing motivated some whites to flee to surrounding counties. Between 1970 and 2000, for example, the white population in ATHA dropped from 252,864 to 108,037. Second, busing did not create a racial balance in the schools. With the combination of white flight and black migration into the county (e.g. ATHA went from 13,030 blacks in 1970 to 125,305 blacks in 2000), a black majority emerged and eliminated racial barriers that had existed. Busing served no obvious purpose.

³³³Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 415-445.

³³⁴Nancy Trejos, "School Desegregation Suit Dismissed in Pr. George's," *Washington Post*, 26 June 2002, A8; Callcott, *Maryland & America*, 245-246.

According to one report, by 1996 “nearly 92 percent of the 11,332 students forced to ride buses were African American, many of them sent to predominantly black schools outside their neighborhoods.”³³⁵ Third, the quality of the school system deteriorated. Moving children out of neighborhood schools removed school and community loyalty as well as parental involvement. Magnet schools were developed to offer specialized studies, but nothing seemed to stem the tide of poor test scores, making Prince George’s one of the worst school systems in the state. Fortunately, the federal courts agreed in 1996 to end busing in exchange for the promise that the County would invest heavily in education. Since then, County Executive Wayne Curry and the school board have upgraded and built neighborhood schools, reduced class size, and hired more teachers, which has escalated the County’s education budget to over one billion dollars.³³⁶

Fourth, the rise of the middle-class suburbanites took an unexpected turn with the emergence of black middle-class suburbanites in the 1980s and 1990s. This new political reality in ATHA and Prince George’s was the result of the previously mentioned white flight and black migration into the County.

At 502,550 in the 2000 census, Prince George’s has become the largest concentration of African Americans in the region, including the cities of Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. More importantly, blacks assumed leadership positions. For example, blacks control the county school board, and John B. Slaughter became the first African-American chancellor (1982-1988) of the University of Maryland, an institution that stood as a bastion of white supremacy fifty years earlier. The most visible symbol of black empowerment, however, was the election of Wayne K Curry in 1994 as County Executive. A corporate attorney before running for office, Curry was the first African American elected to countywide office. He overcame a major budget deficit, attracted high-technology industry, created new jobs, hired more police officers, agreed to support the restoration of the Anacostia River Watershed, and committed resources to improve the school system. In overseeing the second largest political jurisdiction in Maryland, Curry has symbolized the change that has taken place in Prince George’s political climate. No longer do a few white insiders run the County. Just as ATHA had been a harbinger of changes to come for the County, Prince George’s is showcasing the future of Maryland suburbia with its diversification and black empowerment.³³⁷

Conclusion

³³⁵Trejos A8.

³³⁶Trejos A1, A8; Callcott, *Maryland & America*, 246-247; Virta, *Prince George’s County* 249; www.pgcountygovernment.org/.

³³⁷See www.inform.umd.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/PRES/pastpres/slaughter; www.pgcountygovernment.org/.

ATHA, and Prince George's County in general, have undergone tremendous change in the twentieth century. Both started as rural, conservative areas. ATHA began the transformation process by becoming a major residential and research center. With middle-class housing, convenient retail shopping, and jobs, ATHA became the model of the good life for the rest of the County. Over time, this good life would extend to African Americans, and to others in a limited extent, who poured into the area. Today, ATHA and Prince George's County have become a diverse and dynamic metropolitan area. In the words of current County Executive Wayne Curry, himself a symbol of the metamorphosis that has taken place, "This community has been transformed."³³⁸ The citizens of old Prince George's County would not recognize their home in the twenty-first century.

³³⁸See www.pgcountygovernment.org/.



Working on a satellite at Goddard Space Center

